Food Pg40

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TORONTO • WEEKEND DECEMBER 26-28 2008 metronews.ca

Sports Pg22-23

Photos of the past year

Celebrating Kwanzaa

TIM WIECIAWSKI/METRO CANADA

With the help of Jaku Konbit academy students in Ottawa, Ken Campbell lights Kinara candles on a table decorated with the symbols of Kwanzaa. Each of the candles represents one of the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. A new candle is lit for each day of the weeklong celebration from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. Scholar and social activist Ron Karenga created Kwanzaa in 1966 as the first African-American holiday.

Local pg 2
Top 10 GTA stories from past year

Business pg 16
Economic storm may get worse

Canada pg 8
Uncertainty on political front

World pg 12
Change on the horizon with Obama

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Alan Cross offers the best buys

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Michael de Adder's top 'toons

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Free Daily News Group Inc., operating as Metro Toronto 1 Concorde Gate, Suite 703, Toronto, Ontario M3C 3N6. Publisher: Bill McDonald

Eye on the Pan Am Games

At a glitzy gathering of politicians, athletes and business leaders in Toronto on Oct. 2, David Peterson, chair of the 2015 Pan Am Games Bid Committee, launched a bid for the Games, officially called the Toronto and Greater Golden Horseshoe Bid. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Local

Mayor wants 'fare' deal

Keeping TTC fares at current levels is crucial as many Torontonians face increasing economic hardships, Mayor David Miller said Dec. 10. Miller made the comments as city councillors passed Toronto's 2009 capital budget, which invests millions of dollars into civic projects and aims to prop up the city's struggling economy.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

10 stories that made headlines

Top 10 Toronto Local stories

1. Massive series of explosions at Sunrise Propane Industrial Gases that left thousands of people to flee their homes (Aug. 10).
2. The Toronto Stock Exchange's S&P/TSX composite index plunged. Stocks lost about $90 billion in value (Jan. 21).
3. Toronto's main stock index staged its biggest intraday points drop ever. (Oct 6).
4. A massive child pornography sweep netted 23 people across the province, including people in Whitby and Toronto. (Feb. 12)
5. Highway 400 north of Toronto turned into a wrecking yard filled with more than 100 vehicles in chain-reaction accidents caused by blinding, wind-whipped whiteouts. (Jan 20)
6. Toronto's public school board voted to open its first Afrocentric school. (May 21)
7. General Motors Corp. announced that in 2009 it will shut four North American plants, including a truck assembly operation in Oshawa. (June 3)
8. Four found dead in a Scarborough bungalow. (Nov. 19)
9. Media mogul Ted Rogers dies (Dec. 2).
10. Oasis guitarist Noel Gallagher was injured when a man from Pickering ran onto the stage during a performance at the Virgin Festival (Sept. 7).

METRO NEWS SERVICES

Year in review for the GTA

Some of the memorable events around the Greater Toronto Area in 2008:

ANGELA DELUCE/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO

Firefighters work at the scene of a propane explosion at Sunrise Propane in Toronto early on Aug. 10. Police are confirming that a firefighter was found without vital signs near the site of a massive explosion.

January

1 – Toronto's first homicide in 2008 – the 14-year-old stepdaughter and daughter of two veteran Toronto police officers was stabbed multiple times and left to die on a sidewalk near her east Toronto home in what police believe was a twisted plot allegedly hatched by another teenaged girl. Police officers arrested and charged a 17-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl with first-degree murder. Homicide investigators believe the accused girl encouraged the accused boy to kill the victim for reasons that were not clear. The victim is the daughter of a police officer at Scarborough's 42 Division and stepdaughter of a sergeant with the Emergency Task Force.

17 – Former Toronto Maple Leafs captain Rob Ramage returns to St. Louis with a four-year prison sentence hanging over his head for causing the death of ex-Chicago Blackhawk Keith Magnuson, 56, while driving impaired. The four-year term is believed to be among the stiffest ever given in Ontario to somebody with no previous record for drinking and driving, according to legal experts.

19 – Winter returns with brutal fury, turning Highway 400 north of Toronto into a wrecking yard filled with more than 100 vehicles in chain-reaction accidents caused by blinding, wind-whipped whiteouts.

Hundreds more cars were backed up along the highway north and south of Bradford when police closed lanes to tend to the injured and clear the carnage. Most injuries were minor. Buses were brought in from Toronto and York Region to haul out shivering folks stuck in sub-zero temperatures made even colder by heavy winds.

20 – Global stock markets tank as investors get panicky about a potential recession in the United States. The Toronto Stock Exchange's S&P/TSX composite index plunged 604.98 points, or 4.75 per cent, to close at 12,132.14. Stocks lost about $90 billion in value in the biggest drop since the tech bubble burst seven years ago.

February

11 – Police say a massive child pornography sweep that netted 23 people across the province is just the tip of the iceberg. Police forces from London to Ottawa and as far north as Red Lake stormed into homes, arresting 22 people, including a 28-year-old woman from Whitby and a young offender from Hamilton. More than 15,000 people in Ontario — thousands in Toronto alone — use their computers to trade images of child sexual abuse across the globe.

May

21 – In the aftermath of a bitter and often gut-wrenching debate that preceded the decision to set up a public Afrocentric school in Toronto, hopes were riding high that black students who struggle academically might finally be getting the educational boost they need. Toronto's public school board voted to open its first Afrocentric school in hopes of lowering the 40 per cent dropout rate among Toronto's black teens. The aim is to have black teachers and a curriculum that engages black kids when it takes in its first junior kindergarten to Grade 5 students in September 2009.

Continued on pg 4

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City council says 'no' to plastic bottles

Toronto city council voted on Dec. 3 to ban the sale of plastic water bottles on all municipal premises from City Hall to golf courses by 2011. The ban is part of the city's plan to divert 70 per cent of Toronto's waste from the dump by 2010. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Mid-year shock in Oshawa

Continued from pg 4

June

3 – The shock and anger was palpable as stone-faced workers streamed out of General Motors' pickup truck assembly plant in Oshawa after learning the jobs many have held for two decades would soon be gone. Earlier, General Motors Corp. announced that in 2009 it will shut four North American plants, including a truck assembly operation in Oshawa.

AARON LYNETT/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE PHOTO

Chris Buckley, president of Canadian Auto Workers Local 222, addresses the media in Oshawa on June 3 after General Motors announced it will halt production of trucks in the third quarter of 2009.

July

3 — The TTC says it is no longer considering arming its special constables with Tasers and guns. Firearms for transit police were among the options being studied by an outside consultant hired to do a health and safety risk assessment of the job. But the terms of the assessment were changed in May to exclude Tasers and guns. Special constables, who make about 950 arrests annually, already have expandable batons, handcuffs, pepper spray and Kevlar vests.

August

9 — A massive series of explosions at Sunrise Propane Industrial Gases propane plant forced thousands of people to flee their homes in a residential area near Wilson Avenue and Keele Street. A 25-year veteran of the fire department, Bob Leek, died fighting the conflagration. A Sunrise employee was missing and believed also to have died.

Continued on pg 6

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Homicide rates higher in other cities

In July 2008, Statistics Canada released data for crime rates in Canada for 2007. One in five homicides occurred in Toronto in 2007. However, taking population differences into account, homicide rates were highest in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Calgary. **METRO NEWS SERVICES**

Stocks plummet as financial crisis bites

Continued from pg 4

September

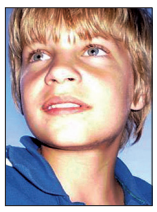
7 — Guitarist Noel Gallagher was injured when a man from Pickering ran onto the stage during a performance at the Virgin Festival in Toronto.

October

6 — Panicking investors pushed stocks to a gut-wrenching drop in Toronto and around the world as fears about a global recession intensified amid the spreading financial crisis. Toronto's main stock index staged its biggest intraday points drop ever — nearly 1,200 points — before rallying back in the afternoon to close down about 573 points or 5.3 per cent. At the day's lows the drop of about 11 per cent was second only to the "Black Monday" crash of Oct. 17, 1987. Toronto's S&P/TSX Composite Index is down some 32 per cent since hitting its all-time peak June 18 — four months ago. At a gathering of top bank economists in Toronto the assessment of Canada's economic situation was generally gloomy, although speakers insisted there is still a chance Canada will avoid a recession.

November

9 — Brandon Crisp, the Barrie teenager who ran away from home in mid-October, likely died after falling from a tree, investigators concluded after an autopsy. Evidence at the scene is consistent with the medical findings, said OPP Const. Mark Maeers. A group of hunters discovered the 15-year-old's body Nov. 5 lying in 1.2-metre high grass below a tree in Oro-Medonte.



Brandon Crisp

19 — The patriarch of a Scarborough family stabbed his wife and two adult children to death before fatally shooting himself in the head. Police confirmed the tragedy was a triple murder-suicide. The three victims died from stab wounds to the torso, according to autopsies later on. The murder victims were Wanda Delong, 64, Richard Delong, 38, and Elizabeth Tompkins, 44. Keith Delong, 66, committed suicide, police said. A poodle named Charlotte was also found dead at the scene. And a hastily hand written note tacked to the front door read "Do not enter, Call Police." There was speculation that Delong and his wife were under financial pressure.

29 — Brandon Kelly's birthday party quickly turned into a real-life nightmare after Gino Petralia, 47, went on a rampage in Oshawa. Stab wounds left the 11-year-old boy's mother dead and his father and two younger brothers seriously injured. Petralia was shot and killed by a Durham police officer. He had a history of mental health problems and threatened the family previously. Rick Kelly, 29, later succumbed to his wounds in hospital. Rick's wife Leslie, 26, was fatally stabbed while trying to protect her children. Three-year-old Nathan Kelly also later died.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

J.P. MOCZULSKI/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO

A TSX ticker sign indicates the market closed down by more than 800 points Oct. 2. Four days later, the index dropped again, at one point by 1,200 points before rallying.

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SHOPPERS DRUG MART

Afghan mission resolution a rare high point of 2008 federal politics

Perhaps the high-water mark in federal politics in 2008 was Parliament's resolution of the future of the Afghanistan military mission. The Commons voted on March 13 to extend the mission to 2011 while accelerating a shift toward training Afghan troops and police. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Canada

Newfoundland rid of label

Newfoundland will mark its diamond anniversary in Confederation in 2009, just as it did when it joined the country — with a surplus — and without the "have-not" label that has hung around the province for half a century. Premier Danny Williams, left, faces the challenge of trying to maintain the province's momentum in the face of a deepening recession.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

'Have-not' Ontario faces dark future

While champagne corks pop in Newfoundland to celebrate its historic admission to the most exclusive club in Confederation, Ontario will be giving up its lifelong membership as it faces a dark, uncertain future as the country's newest have-not province.

For the first time in its history, Ontario is expected to collect $347 million in federal equalization payments in 2009 — for some, the ultimate symbol of its transformation from the country's economic engine to its poor cousins.

Qualify

- Ontario qualified for equalization between 1977 and 1982 when oil prices were high, but it has never received payments under the federal wealth-sharing program since it was introduced in 1957.

Hard hit by massive job losses in its key manufacturing sector and dwindling provincial revenues, Ontario's once booming economy has fallen victim to the global economic crisis. The province is staring down a $500-million deficit this year while resource-rich provinces like Newfoundland are bucking the economic trend with billion-dollar surpluses.

Tumbling oil prices could keep Ontario off the list of have-not provinces in the coming year, but it may not be able to dodge the bullet in 2010, said Finance Minister Dwight Duncan.

Temporary or not, Ontario's new have-not status doesn't tell the whole story, experts say.

"At a high enough energy price, Ontario has got to become a have-not province," said Thomas Courchene, a Queen's University economics professor and expert on equalization.

"It's not that it's falling down so much, it's that the energy provinces are just getting unbelievable amounts of revenue. This raises the average of the system, and Ontario falls below the average."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Raucous end to political year

It seems like a long time ago, but it was only Sept. 7 when Prime Minister Stephen Harper decided it was preferable to ignore his own fixed-date election law rather than permit the 39th Parliament to return for its fall sitting.

ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO

Prime Minister Stephen Harper emerges from Rideau Hall following his meeting with Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean Dec. 4 to announce that Parliament had been prorogued.

Voters, the prime minister said that morning outside Rideau Hall, "will choose between direction or uncertainty; between common sense or risky experiments; between steadiness or recklessness."

Less than four months later, the verdict is in: Uncertainty, risky experiments and recklessness appear to have triumphed.

Whether you're talking about the Conservatives' partisan, stink-bomb-laden fall economic update or the unlikely and unloved opposition coalition it helped spawn, risk, recklessness and uncertainty are the orders of the day as our federal politicians lurch into 2009.

"The irony is we went through an election because of a dysfunctional Parliament," pollster Nik Nanos of Nanos Research said. "There's a pretty high likelihood we're going to have another election for exactly the same reason."

The House of Commons sat for just 93 of 365 days this year — matching a modern low last set in 2000. But it's not like nothing was resolved as a result of Parliament's virtually unprecedented convulsions over the dying weeks of 2008.

Harper's reputation among the chattering class for strategic and tactical genius — not to mention straight talk — has taken a pummelling.

New Democrats have proven they'll dump their defining policy on shifting the tax burden to corporate ledgers in return for a half-dozen seats at the cabinet table.

ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO

Liberal interim leader Michael Ignatieff makes his way from Parliament Hill in Ottawa Dec. 10.

The Bloc Québécois, like some tiresome, pedantic relative, has been rehabilitated within its regional family by the insults of hostile outsiders.

And a Liberal party that was limping along under a lame-duck leader and facing a costly and divisive leadership race suddenly finds itself unified under Michael Ignatieff almost five months ahead of schedule.

How any of these developments will play out in the coming year is the stuff of crystal-ball gazing, not analysis.

But Nanos has his opinion on what could be the winning ballot question in the current economic and political turbulence: "Who can fix the dysfunction?"

A series of confrontational confidence motions wracked the Commons all spring and led to an apparent Tory epiphany come summer.

On Sept. 7 — a day before three federal byelections were scheduled and a week before MPs were to return after the long summer recess — the prime minister visited the Governor General and dissolved Parliament in favour of an Oct. 14 election.

What followed was a nasty, enervating five-week campaign, punctuated at mid-point by a suddenly escalating global financial crisis, that ended with the lowest voter turnout in federal election history.

Early on the morning of Oct. 15, Harper took to the stage in Calgary with a strengthened minority mandate. His 143 MPs in the 308-seat Commons were set against the official Opposition Liberals, reduced to 77 seats and their lowest share of the popular vote since Confederation. It was a Tory victory, but not the clear majority many Harper supporters had hoped for.

The Conservative fall economic update made only the faintest pretext of stimulating a faltering economy while delivering a trio of ideological chop blocks to the opposition and forecasting a highly suspect surplus based on rosy projections and wishful savings. Within three weeks, the Conservatives abandoned those surplus projections and dumped the inflammatory cuts to the public per-vote subsidy for political parties and a ban on public-service strikes — but not before a nascent coalition involving the Liberals and NDP, backed by the Bloc, had been jump-started.

Nanos the pollster suggests views post-prorogation polls that boosted Harper's Conservatives comfortably into majority support territory with skepticism, saying they reflect public disgust with a Dion-led coalition government more than a Tory endorsement.

"I don't think we should confuse anger with action," said the pollster.

It could be the epitaph for federal politics in 2008.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Gloomy economic forecasts fail to curb Green enthusiasm

Now that Canada is in a recession and jobs are disappearing at a rapid rate, it would be reasonable to assume that public concern about the environment — and investment in green technologies — will ebb as worry grows about the economy.

When the price of crude oil peaked at $147 a barrel in July, consumers redoubled their efforts to reduce their home heating costs, prompting renewed interest in renewable energy.

More importantly, there's a growing consensus that Canadians have undergone a profound shift in how they regard the environment and, in particular, the issue of climate change.

"The reaction in the past has typically been: When times get tough, people step back from environmental concerns ... and concentrate on their jobs," says Peter Robinson, CEO of the Vancouver-based Suzuki Foundation.

"This is a much different moment for us ... You don't see the environment slipping off the minds of Canadians. It's still there."

The trend of consumers trying to save money while doing right by the environment has already taken hold in the United States.

The Solar Energy Industries Association, based in Washington, says that between 2006 and 2007 there was a 45 per cent increase in the number of solar energy systems installed.

The industry already employs about 35,000 in the U.S., a figure that is expected to jump to 110,000 by 2016, the association says.

In Canada, the solar industry is much smaller, with only about 2,000 employees. But its prospects look bright, says Elizabeth McDonald of the Ottawa-based Canadian Solar Industries Association.

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Panel vindicates Milgaard
A commission of inquiry concluded in September that the criminal justice system failed David Milgaard. It recommended the federal government create an independent body to review allegations of wrongful conviction. THE CANADIAN PRESS

2008 was eventful year

/M. SPENCER GREEN/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO

Convicted newspaper mogul Conrad Black began serving his six-year sentence for fraud and obstruction of justice on March 3.

January

12 — Seven teenagers, members of a Bathurst, N.B., school basketball team, and a teacher are killed when their van crashes with a truck on an icy road outside Bathurst.

16 — Federal government fires Linda Keen, president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, after she accuses Natural Resources Minister Gary Lunn of interfering with the commission's independence.

February

19 — B.C. government introduces North America's first full-fledged carbon tax.

March

3 — Canadian Mohammed Kohail is sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia, convicted of murder related to schoolyard brawl.

13 — Parliament votes to extend Canada's military mission in Afghanistan by two years to 2011.

29 — Canada's oldest bookstore, Book Room in Halifax, closes after 169 years.

April

3 — Vancouver's park board commissioners vote to cut down 1,000-year-old red cedar tree in Stanley Park damaged in storm.

18 — Canada becomes the first country in the world to limit exposure to the controversial chemical bisphenol A, found in plastic products such as baby and water bottles.

May

1 — The legal age of sexual consent in Canada is raised to 16 from 14.

16 — Canadian Victoria Cross, Canada's highest honour for military valour, is unveiled.

17 — Canadian Autumn Kelly weds the Queen's eldest grandson, Peter Phillips, at Windsor Castle.

June

2 — Former federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough announces her retirement as MP.

16 — Canada lists World Tamil Movement as terrorist organization.

July

1 — Abortion rights activist Dr. Henry Morgentaler's appointment to Order of Canada sparks protest.

7 — Ontario government says it will pay Steven Truscott $6.5 million in compensation nearly five decades after being wrongfully convicted of the murder of a schoolmate.

12 — Jade Scognamillo, a 14-year-old girl from Caledon, Ont., becomes the youngest person to swim across Lake Erie.

August

15 — Christopher Paul Neil, 33, of Maple Ridge, B.C., who worked as a teacher in parts of Asia, is sentenced to three years and three months in Thai prison for sexually abusing 13-year-old boy.

September

7 — Claiming the minority Parliament has become dysfunctional, PM Harper calls general election for Oct. 14.

October

14 — Canada gets its third minority government in four years as Harper's Conservatives return to power in federal election.

29 — Ottawa software developer Momin Khawaja is found guilty of participating in plot to bomb targets in Britain.

November

8 — CBC reporter Melissa Fung, kidnapped by Afghan insurgents outside Kabul, is released after 28 days in captivity.

26 — Two Canadians killed when terrorist gunmen launch launch attacks in Mumbai, killing at least 174 people.

December

1 — Liberals, NDP and BQ sign accord that would support a Liberal-NDP coalition government if the minority Conservative government falls.

4 — Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean grants request from PM Harper to suspend Parliament until late January.

5 — Canada's military death toll in Afghanistan reaches 100.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Luck, good & bad

- March 3 — Conrad Black begins six-year sentence in Florida prison for fraud and obstruction of justice.
- March 15 — Anna Falco, 53, of Woodbridge wins largest-ever slot payout in Canada, almost $9 million, at Casino Rama.

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Tears helped lift Hillary's flagging campaign
Tears in New Hampshire had proven to be the undoing of Democrat Edmund Muskie in 1972 — but it worked for Barack Obama's chief Democratic rival, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. The flash of emotion helped lift Clinton to a win in the New Hampshire primary on Jan. 8. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

World

Most unpopular president

Neither Richard Nixon, nor Harry S. Truman — the president George W. Bush is most often compared to in terms of unpopularity — left the White House with a lower approval rating. A recent CBS poll put Bush at just 20 per cent in public support, a few percentage points lower than Truman's when he limped out of office in 1953.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

New chief faces great expectations

ANXIETY Barack Obama's transition team is said to be in a state of high anxiety these days. Inauguration headaches and cabinet appointments are mere piffle compared to the economic meltdown, and fears that the recession is going to get a lot worse before it gets better.

This is the stuff of nightmares for the president-elect and his team, and the reason why they're working hard on a stimulus plan now pegged at a staggering $1 trillion US.

Christina Romer, who will lead Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, is surveying the country's leading economists, trying to build political consensus around the $1 trillion price tag — significantly more than the $600 billion being publicly bandied about. The Wall Street Journal has reported that aides consider $600 billion over two years "a very low-end estimate."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Obama: Yes, he could

In the first week of 2008, Barack Obama rocked the political world with a win in the Iowa caucuses which is 95 per cent white and 2.5 per cent black. But the question remained: Could this black man with a rich personal history and sparse elective resumé make it all the way?

JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

U.S. president elect Barack Obama stands on stage with his wife Michelle and daughters Malia and Sasha on election night Nov. 4, in Chicago, Ill.

Yes, he could. Obama took Americans along on a wild ride, smashing political and racial barriers as he was elected the 44th president of the United States in an electoral landslide. His message of hope and change — and the mantra of "Yes, we can" — resonated with millions of voters after eight years of George W. Bush.

All election years are for the history books, but this one seemed especially historic: The racial angle. The high stakes. The fascinating personalities. The huge amount of money raised. The intense, sometimes over-the-top interest in this campaign.

Less than four years before, Obama — then a little-known state lawmaker from Illinois — captured the nation's attention with a stirring speech at the Democratic National Convention. He went on to battle for months against Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton through every state and territory. Obama survived.

Meanwhile, John McCain, nearly broke and with staff gone, scrapped his tour bus and relied on supporters to drive him to events, until he locked up the Republican nomination on March 4. Five months later, in need of something to shake up the race, he looked to Alaska and to former beauty pageant contestant Gov. Sarah Palin as a running mate.

In the end it wasn't enough. The final tally: 365 electoral votes for Obama, 173 for McCain.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Top 10 stories of the year

2008 The epic election that made Barack Obama the first African-American president was the top news story of 2008 — followed closely by the economic meltdown that will test his leadership, according to U.S. editors and news directors.

Two other political sagas — the history-making candidacies of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin — also made the list.

2008's top 10 stories:

1. U.S. ELECTION: Obama emerged as a decisive victor after a gruelling battle with Clinton and then an often-nasty showdown with the McCain/Palin ticket.

2. MELTDOWN: The collapses of Wall Street giants; huge stock market losses; plummeting home prices and a surge of foreclosures; desperate times for U.S. automakers added up to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

3. OIL PRICES: The price of crude soared as high as $150 a barrel in July before crashing to $33 this month.

4. IRAQ: The "surge" of U.S. troops helped reduce violence after five years of war, but Iraq is still buffeted daily by bombings, ambushes and kidnappings.

5. OLYMPICS: China drew praise for its logistical mastery and condemnation for heavy-handed security measures.

6. CHINA EARTHQUAKE: A May quake killed 70,000 people in Sichuan province and left 5 million homeless.

7. SARAH PALIN: Few outside Alaska knew much about its governor when U.S. presidential candidate John McCain picked her as his running mate.

8. MUMBAI TERRORISM: Ten attackers terrorized India's financial capital in November, killing 164 people in co-ordinated attacks.

9. HILLARY CLINTON: She came closer than any other woman in U.S. history to becoming a major party's presidential nominee — which helped persuade Obama to choose her as secretary of state.

10. RUSSIA-GEORGIA WAR: The five-day war in August was ignited by a Georgian artillery barrage on breakaway South Ossetia.

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Will history judge Bush less harshly?

George W. Bush had a pair of shoes hurled at him. And he's become so accustomed to being despised that he cracked jokes about his own hanging at the unveiling of a presidential portrait in Philadelphia.

But Bush is hoping future academics are kinder to him. As he prepares to retire to Texas after Barack Obama's inauguration on Jan. 20, those close to the 62-year-old Bush say he has faith that Americans might come to better appreciate his eight years in office as time passes.

"I'd like to be a president known as somebody who liberated 50 million people and helped achieve peace," said Bush, referring to the widely detested war in Iraq.

Bush has had some accomplishments as president, largely overshadowed by the fact he's embroiled the United States in two unpopular wars and left the country at the precipice of what many fear could be another Great Depression.

But Bush supporters are quick to point out that there have been no major terrorist attacks on U.S. soil since 9/11, crediting the war on terror.

> **"I'd like to be a president known as somebody who liberated 50 million people and helped achieve peace."**
> George W. Bush

In Africa, Bush is a hero after quietly tripling aid to the continent, spending billions on AIDS treatment and prevention and a major malaria abatement initiative. His policies are estimated to have saved 10 million lives.

Consequently, the president has an 80 per cent popularity rating in Africa, where there are a number of young George Bushes running around, possessing the name given to them by their grateful parents.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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They gave us the artificial foot and seven words you can never say on TV

Dr. Pramod Karan Sethi, 80, the inventor of the low-cost artificial foot that helped millions in developing nations, died on Jan. 6. George Carlin, 71, the dean of counterculture comedians who taught us Seven Words You Can Never Say On TV, died on June 22. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Final farewell to those who left their mark

From the summit of Everest, the top of the world, to the intricate workings of the human heart. From outer galaxies to the dungeons of Stalin's gulag.

Sir Edmund Hillary was the first man to stand atop the world's highest mountain.

Dr. Michael DeBakey developed treatments for heart disease that prolonged the lives of millions.

Arthur C. Clarke carried readers and moviegoers light-years into space and centuries into the future.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn bravely revealed the horrors of the Soviet prison system.

Mildred Loving changed history in 1967 when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld her right, as a black woman, to marry a white man.

Madelyn Payne Dunham helped raise her grandson Barack Obama and died just two days before he was elected president.

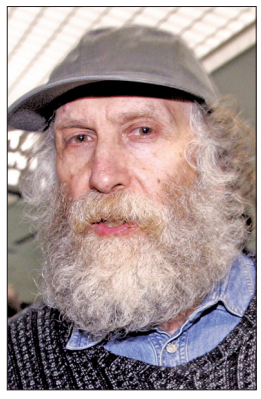
We also said goodbye to chess master Bobby Fischer.

The world of science lost Dr. Judah Folkman, famed cancer researcher; Edward Lorenz, father of chaos theory; and Albert Hofmann, discoverer of LSD.

Charlton Heston brought a larger-than-life quality to screen roles as Ben-Hur and Michelangelo.

Paul Newman combined rebellion and blue-eyed charm in films that reflected changing social attitudes.

They are some of the remarkable people who died in 2008.



Bobby Fischer

JANUARY:

Erich Kaestner, 107. Believed to be Germany's last First World War veteran. Jan. 1.

Sir Edmund Hillary, 88. Conquered Mount Everest; one of the 20th century's greatest adventurers. Jan. 11.

Richard Knerr, 82. Co-founded Wham-O toy company that popularized Hula Hoop, Frisbee. Jan. 14.

Bobby Fischer, 64. Reclusive chess genius who dethroned Soviet champion in 1972. Jan. 17.

George Habash, 81. His PLO faction gained notoriety for 1970 hijackings of four western airliners. Jan. 26.

Suharto, 86. Indonesian president, a Cold War U.S. ally whose brutal regime killed hundreds of thousands. Jan. 27.

FEBRUARY:

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, around 91. Beatles' guru; introduced transcendental meditation to West. Feb. 5.

Imad Mughniyeh, 45. One of world's most wanted terrorists; suspected in 1980s attacks on Americans in Lebanon. Feb. 12. Car bombing.

MARCH:

Gary Gygax, 69. Co-created "Dungeons & Dragons"; father of role-playing games. March 4.

Arthur C. Clarke, 90. Visionary science-fiction writer ("2001: A Space Odyssey"). March 19.

Edmund Hillary

APRIL:

John A. Wheeler, 96. Physicist; coined "black holes." April 13.

Edward Lorenz, 90. Father of chaos theory, "butterfly effect" concept. April 16.

Albert Hofmann, 102. Discoverer of LSD, which inspired — and arguably corrupted — millions in 1960s. April 29.

Bobby Fischer

MAY:

Deborah Jeane Palfrey, 52. "D.C. Madam" convicted of running elite prostitution ring. May 1. Suicide.

Mildred Loving, 68. Black woman whose challenge to Virginia's interracial marriage ban led to landmark ruling. May 2.

Irvine Robbins, 90. Co-founded Baskin-Robbins, made exotic ice cream widely available. May 5.

JUNE:

Yves Saint Laurent, 71. One of most influential fashion designers of the 20th century. June 1.

Tim Russert, 58. Host of "Meet the Press" whose personality and passion made him beloved in Washington. June 13.

JULY:

Larry Harmon, 83. He turned Bozo the Clown into a show business staple. July 3.

Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, 99. Heart surgeon who pioneered now-common procedures such as bypass surgery. July 11.

Bruce E. Ivins, 62. Army scientist named as top suspect in 2001 anthrax attacks. July 29. Suicide.

AUGUST:

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 89. Nobel-winning Russian author who chronicled Stalin's slave labour camps. Aug. 3.

Mahmoud Darwish, 67. Palestinian poet who eloquently told of his people's experiences. Aug. 9.

SEPTEMBER:

W.D. Mohammed, 74. Succeeded father as Nation of Islam leader. Sept. 9.

Paul Newman, 83. Oscar-winning actor/philanthropist who never lost the heartthrob cool of his anti-hero performances. Sept. 26.

OCTOBER:

Joerg Haider, 58. Made his rightist party into powerful force in Austria. Oct. 11. Car accident.

George Keller, 84. Oversaw 1984 formation of energy giant Chevron. Oct. 17.

Mr. Blackwell, 86. Designer whose worst-dressed list skewered fashion felonies. Oct. 19.

NOVEMBER:

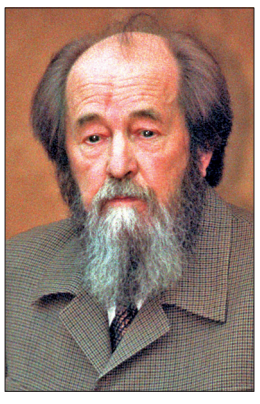
Madelyn Payne Dunham, 86. Barack Obama's grandmother, who helped raise him. Nov. 2.

Steve Fossett, 63. Millionaire adventurer who vanished during 2007 flight. Death confirmed Nov. 3.

Michael Crichton, 66. Author whose books became blockbuster films ("Jurassic Park"). Nov. 4.

Edna Parker, 115. World's oldest person. Nov. 26.

Rev. George M. Docherty, 97. His 1954 sermon got "under God" into U.S. Pledge of Allegiance. Nov. 27.



Alexander Solzhenitsyn

DECEMBER:

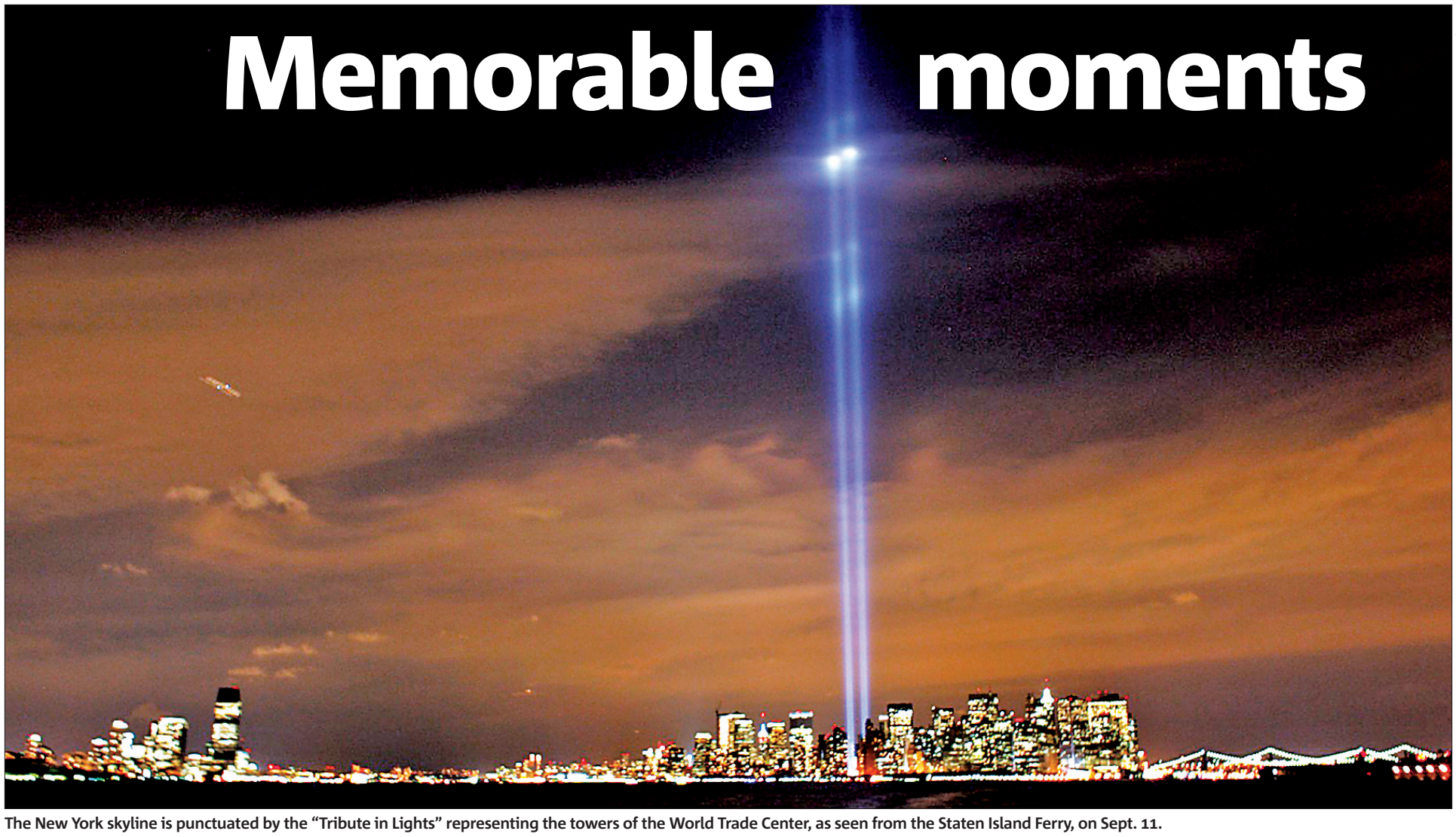
Patriarch Alexy II. 79. Russian Orthodox Church head; oversaw post-Soviet era's religious revival. Dec. 5.

"Sunny" von Bulow, 76. Comatose heiress; husband was acquitted of attempted murder. Dec. 6.

Bettie Page, 85. Beauty who daringly bared it all in the straitlaced '50s. Dec. 11.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Memorable moments



ED OU/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The New York skyline is punctuated by the "Tribute in Lights" representing the towers of the World Trade Center, as seen from the Staten Island Ferry, on Sept. 11.

CHARLES DHARAPAK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

BELA SZANDELSZKY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

MUHAMMED MUHEISEN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

FERNANDO BUSTAMANTE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Middle left: President Bush and a graduate bump chests at the United States Air Force Academy graduation ceremony in Colorado Springs, on May 28. **Middle:** Lebanese children play soccer in front of a road-block set by Hezbollah and other Shiite militiamen on a highway leading to the international airport of Beirut, Lebanon, on May 14. Right: A boy jumps into the water, in the port of the old city of Akko in northern Israel, on Aug. 14. **Bottom:** A reveler throws tomato pulp at another during the annual food fight, the Tomatina, in the small Spanish town of Bunol, Spain, on Aug. 27.

Little appetite for deficit

A Canadian Press Harris/Decima poll conducted in mid-month found only 39 per cent support for stimulus spending if it means Ottawa will go into deficit. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Business

Stelmach woos investors

Falling prices, delayed projects and a hike in royalties have left some investors leery about parking their money in Alberta's oilsands. So Premier Ed Stelmach spent 10 days in Europe this fall trying to sell Alberta as a reliable energy source. He made a similar trip to Washington earlier in the year and was in Texas in December. THE CANADIAN PRESS

EDITOR: FERMIN DESOUZA, FERMIN.DESOUZA@METRONEWS.CA

Economic tsunami will wash out 2009

Even the rosiest of economic forecasts shows on average Canadians will get poorer in 2009, and many will lose their jobs as the recession deepens.

The economic tsunami hit Canada's shores with a crash in the fall and is only now washing deeper inshore swallowing an economy that once appeared impregnable.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper described it best in a recent television interview in which he perhaps tellingly did not reject the possibility of a depression — a deep economic downturn in which output shrinks by 10 per cent. He has suggested spending measures in the $20-billion range are being prepared for the Jan. 27 budget, at a price of a huge deficit.

The shocker, however, is that most expect a seldom considered statistic called nominal gross domestic product — which measures the value of what the country produces — to become headline news next year as the wealth-effect of high commodity prices over the last six years gets reversed big time with oil in the tank and prices of minerals, grains, coal and other commodities also in decline. Many are expecting nominal GDP to shrink by three per cent in 2009, bringing lower corporate profits, lower government revenues and lower wages for Canadians.

The latest projections also predict Canada's unemployment rate will rise to about eight per cent, from the current 6.3 per cent, resulting in something Canadians haven't seen in a generation, outright job losses of 200,000 from the recession's peak to trough. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Economists see ray of light

- A recovery is coming, economists say, likely from a combination of several factors — from the trillions of dollars being poured into the economy from governments around the world, to cheap oil which will cut business costs and leave more money in the pockets of consumers, and a rebound in sinking consumer confidence blamed on global markets' plunge.

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Light Rail Transit (LRT) is an updated and improved version of the streetcars that have moved Torontonians for decades, and will bring a new concept of reliable and comfortable transit service to Toronto's busiest transit routes. Transit City routes will be fully accessible, so that people with all levels of mobility can use the service with confidence and ease.

WHERE TRANSIT CITY IS TAKING TORONTO

DON MILLS LRT

Don Mills

This 18-kilometre long line will run along the Don Mills Road corridor from the Bloor-Danforth Subway to Steeles Avenue and potentially into York Region.

EGLINTON CROSSTOWN LRT

Eglinton Crosstown

This 31-kilometre long route will link Kennedy Station in the east with Pearson Airport and the Mississauga Transitway in the west. The line will operate in an underground tunnel from approximately Laird Drive in the east to Keele Street in the west.

ETOBICOKE FINCH W. LRT

Etobicoke-Finch West

This 18-kilometre long route will link Finch Station with northern Etobicoke, provide direct service to Humber College and could be extended to Mississauga, the Woodbine racetrack or Pearson Airport.

JANE LRT

Jane

This 17-kilometre long route will stretch along Jane Street from the Bloor-Danforth Subway to the new Steeles West Station on the Spadina Subway and, potentially, further into York Region.

SCARBOROUGH MALVERN LRT

Scarborough Malvern

This 15-kilometre long route will link Kennedy Station with northern Scarborough and Malvern, and provide direct service to the University of Toronto at Scarborough and Centennial College's Ellesmere Campus.

SHEPPARD E. LRT

Sheppard East

This 14-kilometre long route will extend rapid transit service east from Don Mills Station to northern Scarborough, Malvern, and, potentially, Durham Region.

WATERFRONT W. LRT

Waterfront West

This 11-kilometre long extension of the Harbourfront streetcar line will link Union Station and Exhibition Place with Parkdale, High Park, and southern Etobicoke, and could be extended into Mississauga.

TRANSITCITY

Oilsands facing uncertain future

Thousands of workers from as far away as the Philippines are watching their jobs in Alberta evaporate as the richest oil boom in the province's history deflates.

The steady stream of workers that had been pouring into northern Alberta reversed this fall as nearly every major project was delayed, cancelled or scaled back.

"The gold rush is over," said a recruiter for a large multinational firm. "Up until four or five months ago, there were shortages in pretty much every trade," he said. "The higher-paying jobs seemed to dry up all at once this fall, as did the need to bring in people from other provinces and other countries."

Sinking oil prices have forced skittish investors to hedge their bets on half a dozen multibillion-dollar oilsands projects, leaving one of the key engines of Canada's economy teetering on an uncertain future.

The scramble to mine tar-like bitumen and refine it into synthetic crude stopped abruptly after oil prices, which had soared to $147 US in the summer, tumbled below $40 US.

After 15 consecutive massive surpluses, Finance Minister Iris Evans admits Alberta could be heading for a deficit in 2009-10.

> **"You can make $70,000 up there (Alberta) in three months."**
> Ben Stacey, pipefitter from Newfoundland, who was making $70 an hour in the oilsands before his sudden layoff

Former Syncrude president Eric Newell has seen these sorts of setbacks before and remains optimistic, pointing out that even at a slower pace, the oilsands are still a huge part of Canada's economy. "The world's going to need every form of energy it can find," said Newell. "And a lot of the oil is located in areas of the world that are not that politically stable."

Alberta Energy Minister Mel Knight predicts the downturn will be short-lived. "I think by the middle of 2009 we'll be looking at investment in this province again." THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Calvillo wins CFL MOP

Montreal Alouettes quarterback Anthony Calvillo won the CFL's Most Outstanding Player award in November. Calvillo threw for 5,624 yards and 43 touchdowns, but the Als came up short in the Grey Cup again, losing to Calgary. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Sports

Attention getter

Paraguayan javelin thrower Leryn Franco became an Internet sensation during the Beijing Olympics, thanks in part to her side career as a fashion model and rumoured romance with Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic. In Beijing, Franco threw 15 metres short of her personal best, finishing 51st overall. METRO NEWS SERVICES

JOHN.CHICK@METRONEWS.CA

Blue Jays **So long, A.J.**

LUCAS OLENIUK/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Pitcher A.J. Burnett opted out of his Blue Jays contract in November, ultimately signing with the New York Yankees. Jays fans, meanwhile, enter Year 8 of what GM J.P. Ricciardi called a "five-year plan" when he was hired before the 2002 season.

Toronto's top 5 stories of '08

Ted Rogers dies

Rogers Communications founder and Blue Jays owner Ted Rogers passed away in December, days before Toronto's first NFL regular-season game that he helped bring to the city. While not a rabid sports fan himself, from the Bills to the Rogers Cup tennis tournament, to the massive marketing project the Jays began under his watch, his impact on the Toronto sports scene was unquestionable. His passing also leaves questions about much of it.

Sayonara Sundin

In the spring, Leafs captain Mats Sundin refused to waive the no-trade clause in his contract, handcuffing the team from using its most valuable asset to rebuild. Becoming a free agent, Sundin sat out until December, signing with the Vancouver Canucks and ending his 14-year stint with Toronto, including 10 as captain. He leaves as the Leafs' career leader in both goals scored and assists.

Bills in Toronto

While the lukewarm ticket response could suggest Toronto doesn't crave the NFL as much as was believed, the likely reality is that exorbitant ticket prices drove down demand for the Dolphins-Bills game on Dec. 7. Fan or not, one way or another the city had been trying to host the NFL in some fashion for about a quarter-century. And while the game was a dud, history was still made.

Mats Sundin ends his Leaf career with a franchise-record 987 points.

Mitchell out, Triano in

Sam Mitchell was fired as Raptors coach in December after a 132-93 drubbing by the Nuggets in Denver. While many saw it coming, few expected it that soon into the season.

Mitchell was an entertaining sound bite who will be missed by the city's media. Assistant Jay Triano took over, becoming the first full-time Canadian head coach in NBA history.

The life of Brian

While the hype was manufactured by the media, the Leafs hiring of Brian Burke in November signalled a new approach from Maple Leafs ownership. Burke was given more power than his predecessors, and his proclivity for honest sound bites should keep the media entertained for however long he stays.

But will he deliver a Cup?

METRO NEWS SERVICES

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- Five-Star frontal crash test rating◇

★★★★★
FIVE-STAR FRONTAL CRASH TEST RATING◇

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INCL. $500 CASH BONUS[1]

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★★★★★
FIVE-STAR FRONTAL CRASH TEST RATING◇

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CITY: 9.2 L/100km /31 MPG

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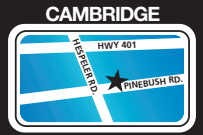

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Avery muzzled
Sean Avery's tenure with the Dallas Stars came to an unceremonious end in December after making lewd remarks regarding two of his ex-girlfriends who are currently dating other NHL players. **METRO NEWS SERVICES**

Moments in time

"The best thing about sports is the sense of community and shared emotion it can create." — *Bob Costas*

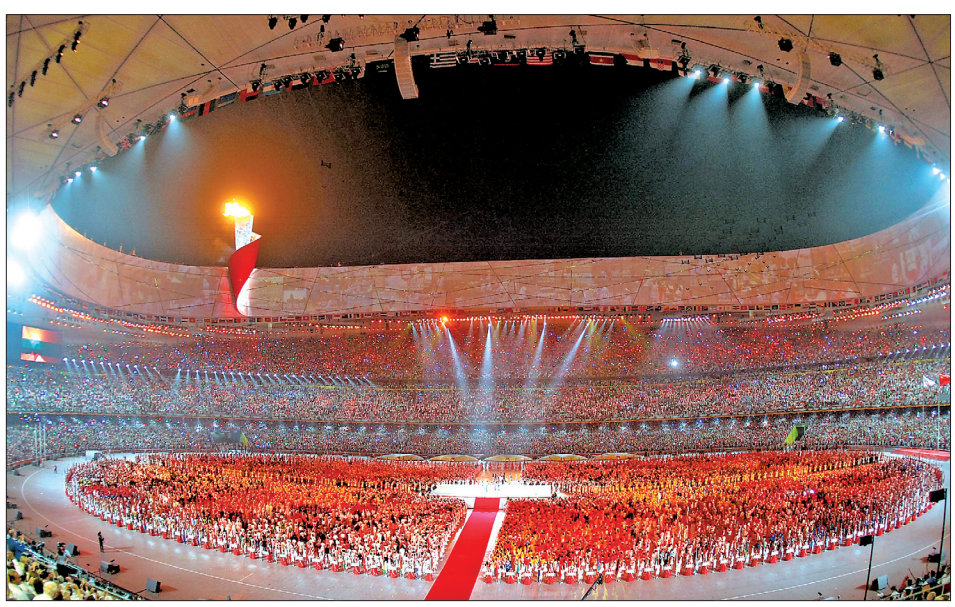
Left: Alexander Ovechkin became the first NHLer in 12 years to score 60 goals.

Left: Chantal Petitclerc won the Lou Marsh Trophy. Right: Phillies won World Series.

Left: Priscilla Lopes-Schliep of Canada jumps into Australian Sally McLellan's arms after winning bronze in the women's 100m hurdles in Beijing.

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

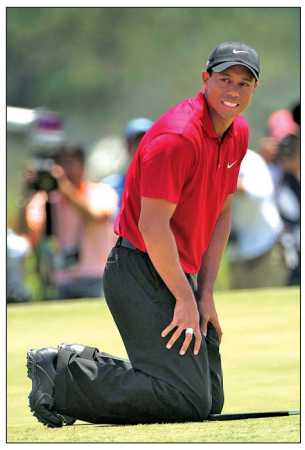
The Cheer is Here.



Left: Beijing's dazzling Olympic opening ceremony served notice to the world. Above: Spain wins Euro 2008.

Above: Canada's Carol Huynh celebrates her Olympic gold medal in freestyle wrestling. Right: The Calgary Stampeders share their Grey Cup win with their fans.

Ronaldo most searchable
Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo was named Yahoo! Canada's most searched athlete of 2008. Sidney Crosby was third on the list. METRO NEWS SERVICES



Left: Tiger Woods rests his injured knee before winning the U.S. Open. Above: Jamaica's Usain Bolt breaks the world record in the Olympic 100m men's final.

Canada's Christine Nesbitt has won three golds on the World Cup speedskating circuit this year.

David Tyree's improbable fourth-quarter catch set up the New York Giants stunning 17-14 upset of previously unbeaten New England in the Super Bowl.

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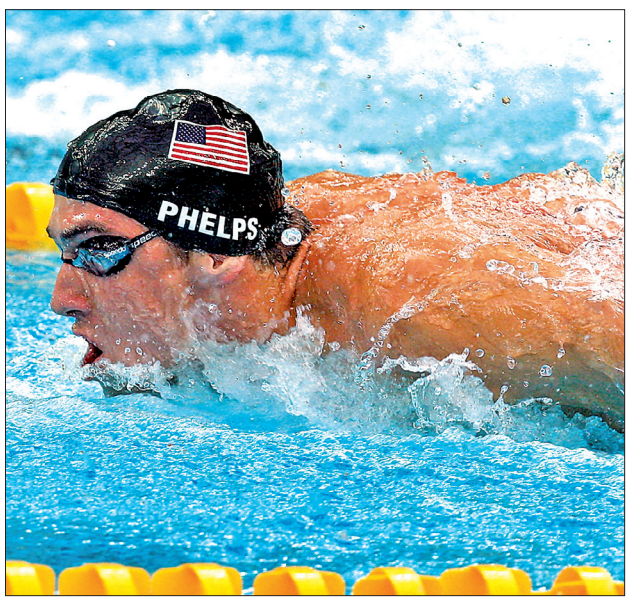
Above: Rafael Nadal collapses after winning a marathon seven-hour Wimbledon men's final against Roger Federer, a victory some call the greatest tennis match ever played. Right: Kris Draper hoists the Stanley Cup for Detroit.

Above: Kevin Garnett celebrates the Boston Celtics' first NBA title in 22 years. Right: Michael Phelps broke an Olympic¶ record by winning eight gold medals in Beijing.



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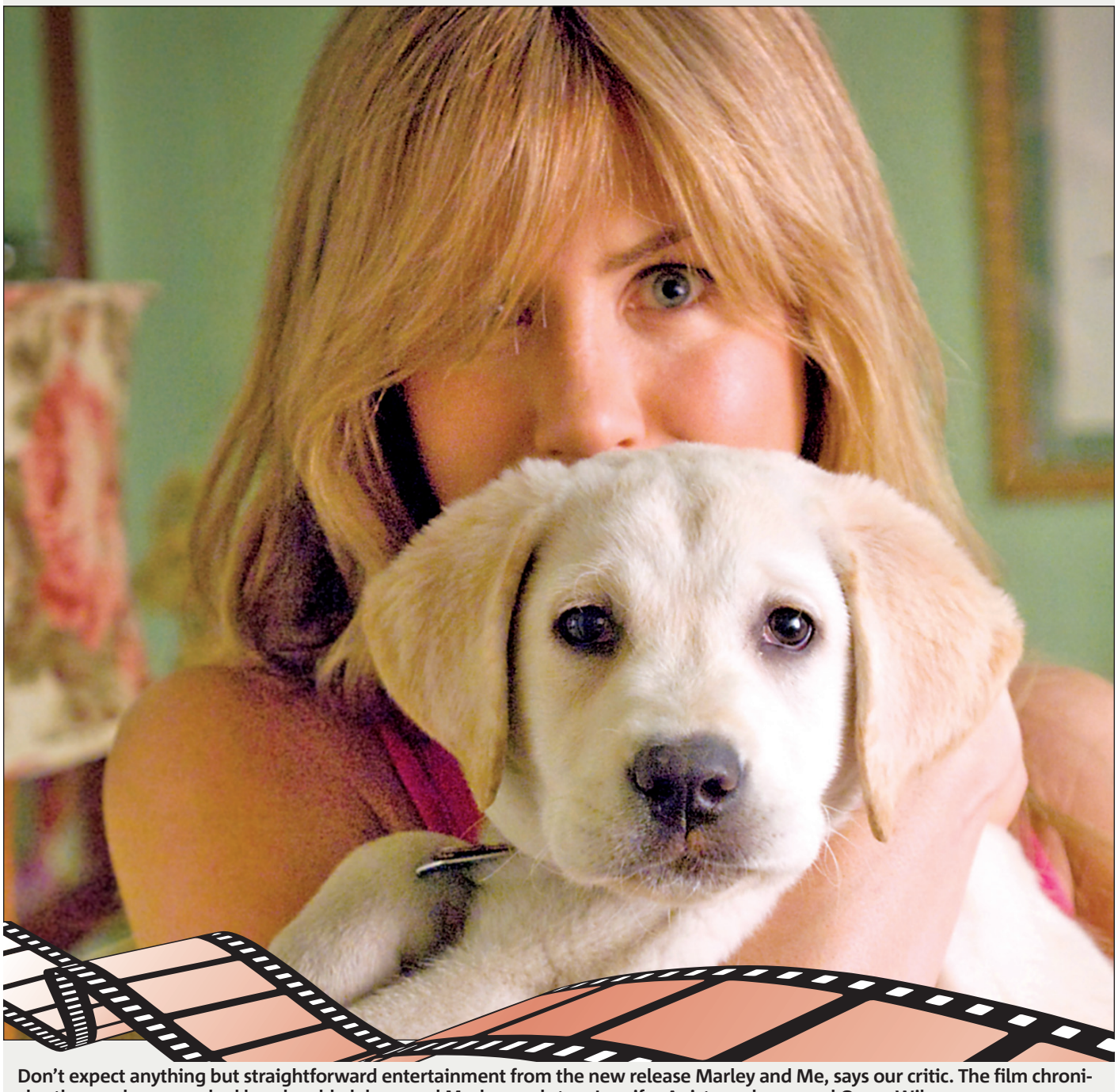
Movies&Entertainment

Movies

Cute and fluffy

Pg 26



Don't expect anything but straightforward entertainment from the new release Marley and Me, says our critic. The film chronicles the mayhem wreaked by a lovable lab named Marley, and stars Jennifer Aniston, above, and Owen Wilson.

Movies Pg 31

Bruce McDonald's Pontypool leads 2009 Canuck releases.

Music Pg 37

Singer-songwriter Leslie Feist plans some downtime.

Theatre Pg 39

Take in Ian Fleming's second-best-known creation.

And the Oscar goes to ...
The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will announce which films, actors and actresses are nominated for Oscars on the morning of Jan. 22. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Movies

●●●●● A CLASSIC; ●●●● EXCELLENT; ●●● GOOD; ●● FAIR; ● POOR

Waltz offers a distinct journey

Waltz with **Bashir**

Director: Ari Folman
Classification: STC
Rating: ●●●●

KEVIN COURRIER
for Metro Canada

GoldenGlobes

• Waltz with Bashir is nominated for Best Foreign Language Film.

REVIEW The Israeli animated feature Waltz with Bashir is a war movie that resists easy categorization.

Writer-director Ari Folman, who served in the Israeli army, examines the traumatic aftermath of the 1982 Lebanese War where Palestinians, in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, were massacred by Lebanon's Christian Phalangist militia. Although the Israeli command were not directly responsible for the killings, they provided cover for the Phalangists to attack. The murders were perpetrated following the assassination of Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel.

Waltz with Bashir doesn't delve into the political dynamics of the war, but it does something more distinct. Folman takes the viewer on a psychological journey into the tormented and vacant memories of Israeli soldiers who haven't been quite the same since they abetted those horrors two decades earlier. Folman goes beneath the reported facts and details into the harrowing experiences of young soldiers still trying to sort out memory from nightmare.

Although the use of animation is somewhat suggestive of pictures like Persepolis, this film isn't quite so stylistically self-conscious. The sickly, hallucinatory images in Bashir unfold out of Folman's own growing awareness of his personal participation in the bloody war's aftermath. Besides being a boldly original memoir, Waltz with Bashir is an evocative, compelling picture that searches for truth just as passionately as it yearns for it.

Marley and Me purely entertainment

Marley and **Me**

Director: David Frankel
Stars: Owen Wilson, Jennifer Aniston
Classification: PG
Rating: ●●●

ROBYN YOUNG
for Metro Canada

Get out the tissues for Marley and Me: The film version has the same tear-jerking affects as the bestselling novel.

For those not familiar with journalist John Grogan's memoir chronicling his life with beloved Golden lab Marley, nothing much happens. It's the simple story of a family and a dog and the everyday challenges they face as they grow together.

At the opening, Owen Wilson as Grogon has just married his sweetheart Jenny (Jennifer Aniston). They move from chilly Michigan to Florida where both land staff writing jobs at competing newspapers. Life is good as their careers take off but soon enough, John begins to worry Jenny's biological clock might be ticking.

Quintessential-bachelor buddy Sebastian (Grey's Anatomy's Eric Dane) suggests a puppy might be enough to quench her motherly desires and John surprises Jenny with a trip to a breeder where they fall in love with a "clearance puppy". Marley is the one, chubby little sausage out of the pack whose price has been knocked down for reasons that soon become clear.

He spends the next 14 years tearing apart the house, peeing on the floor, scattering dog food everywhere, chewing holes through the furniture, ripping down blinds and curtains, and generally wreaking havoc. When John is made a columnist, Marley's antics provide years of fodder and the story continues, happily, with naughty but lovable Marley at the centre of it all as the couple adds three kids to their clan.

Marley and Me fits into that rare category of flicks that exists purely for the purpose of entertainment. It stays away from gratuitous violence and nudity; there are no vulgar jokes delivered simply for shock value, and complicated turns and twists are kept out of the straightforward plot.

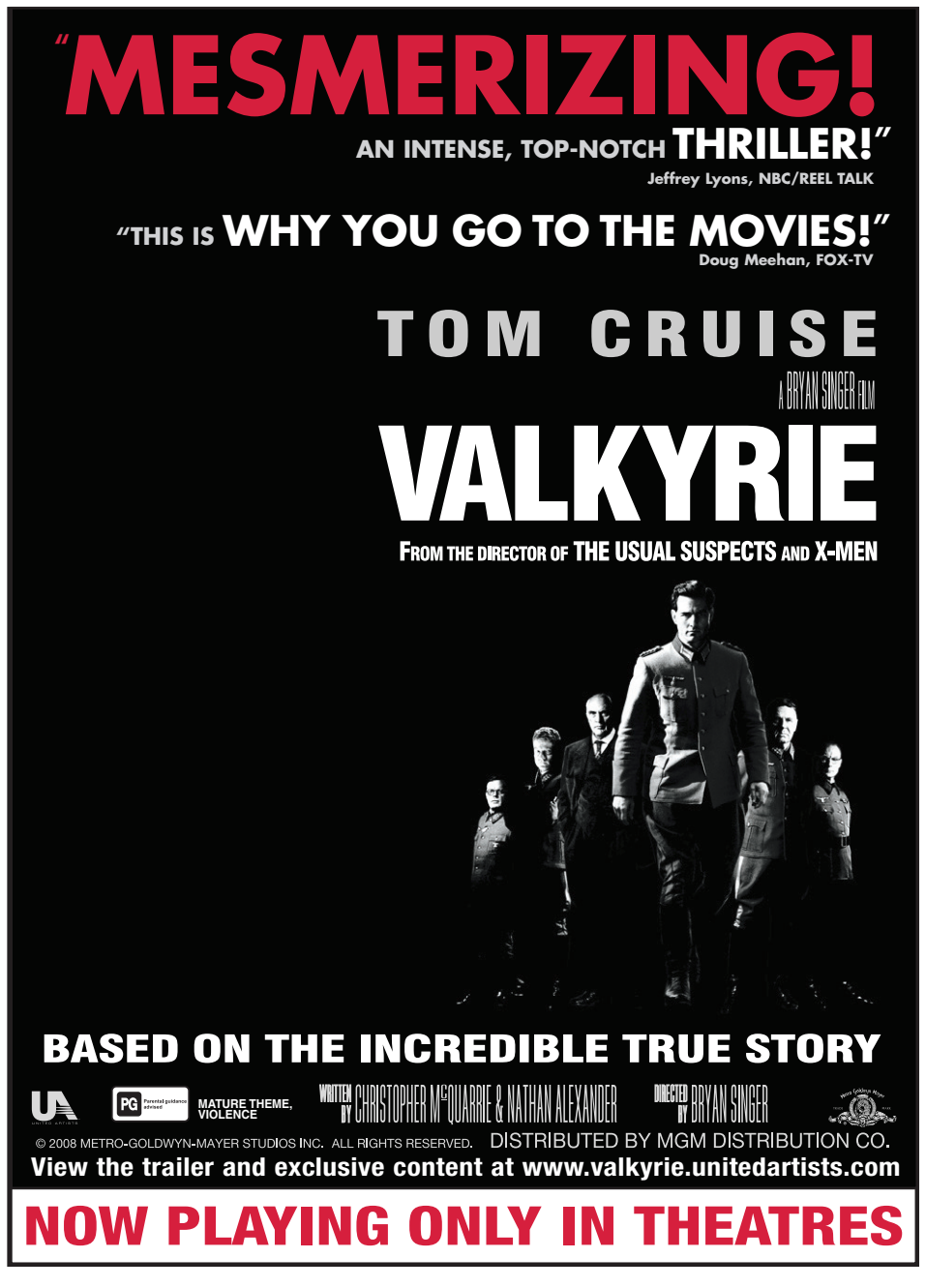
The conclusion is expected but well-directed by David Frankel (The Devil Wears Prada) and the story wraps up as a touching love story between a man and his dog and the 14 years they spend together.

Aniston's performance is predictable: She plays the same wife, girlfriend, friend she always has. But Wilson plays a charmingly domesticated version of his usual kooky characters.

Kathleen Turner appears in a semi-comical cameo that could have been left out as a strict, husky-voiced dog trainer who insists no dog is "incorrigible" as Marley is described.

And Alan Arkin is hilarious as John's hard-nosed editor and mentor, time and again delivering the best lines of the film.

Owen Wilson and Jennifer Aniston star in Marley and Me.



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The 66th annual Golden Globe Awards will air on NBC on Sunday, Jan. 11, while the 15th annual SAG Awards will air live on Sunday, Jan. 25, on TNT and TBS. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Movies

A CLASSIC; EXCELLENT; GOOD; FAIR; POOR

Movies that take you beyond the mat

InFocus

mrchaos33@hotmail.com

The great irony of good wrestling movies is that real, honest-to-God wrestlers rarely ever star in them. This week Mickey Rourke gives a tour-de-force performance in The Wrestler as Randy the Ram, an over-the-hill wrestler; a once famous athlete capable of packing Madison Square Gardens, now a raggedly collection of shin splits, aching bones and broken spirit that should earn him an Oscar nod. Aha, you say. Rourke used to be a boxer. Isn't that the same thing? Well, according to director Darren Aronofsky not so much.

"It's easy to think it was easy for Mickey to do this because of his experience in the ring but I think it was twice as hard because he had to unlearn everything," he said. "In boxing the whole game is to hide your emotions and moves.

"When you do a punch in wrestling you want people in the bleachers to see it happening three minutes before it comes. So for Mickey to ham it up like that when he was taught to move as a boxer was a real challenge."

Rourke is perfect for the role; his face looks like he's been beaten up by an angry plastic surgeon, and his slouching walk belies years of extreme physical abuse. But not all actors to play wrestling's "faces" and "heels" have been so well cast.

Flesh, a little known John Ford film from 1932, sees Wallace Beery — former silent movie and musical theater star — play a waiter-turned-wrestler who discovers his wife is having an affair. Even stranger casting than that was spindly Henry Winkler — The Fonz — as an unemployed actor who becomes a wrestling star (alongside Herve Villechaize) in the comedy The One and Only. Then there's Blood & Guts a 1978 film which sees aging wrestler Danny O'Neil, played by William Smith, wear a silver 10 gallon top hat in the ring.

To get the real deal on wrestling check out Beyond the Mat, a documentary from comedy writer and wrestling fan Barry Blaustien. His behind the scenes look at the pro circuit and its stars works on an almost Shakespearean level, revealing the tragedy, rage, humor, violence, intrigue, hucksterism and real human stories of the sport.

It's a movie that should be placed alongside Pumping Iron and When We Were Kings as movies that uncover the private side of sports entertainment. We all know wrestling is fake, but after seeing Beyond the Mat it seems a little more real.

Richard Crouse is the author of Son of the 100 Best Movies You've Never Seen and film critic for CTV's Canada AM.

Movie morsels

Australia

REVIEW Australia is a beautifully filmed study of a vast land that — as one character says — has "a strange power." What director Baz Luhrmann should fret over is the drawn-out narrative that plays to melodramatic excess. Set during the outbreak of World War II, Australia features Nicole Kidman as Lady Ashley, widow of a mysteriously murdered cattle ranch owner. When confronted by her husband's rival with a takeover bid, Ashley hires a maverick stockman (Hugh Jackman) and joins him on a massive cattle drive across the outback.

Steve Gow/Metro Canada

Bedtime Stories

REVIEW Bedtime Stories brings Adam Sandler to Disney and the results are predictably placid. The film is far too predictable childish to appeal to the actor's core audience, coming off like the type of forgettable family comedy that would have starred Steve Guttenberg and gone straight to video 10 years ago.

Phil Brown/Metro Canada

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

REVIEW Based on a tale by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Button tells the life story of a man who is born with the physicality of an 80-year-old but mysteriously ages in reverse meeting impossible challenges along the way. If that vaguely sounds a bit Forrest Gumpish, don't be surprised — Gump's Eric Roth penned this human epic too. There's a lot of talk about Brad Pitt possibly sneaking an Oscar, and he definitely gives the best performance of his career.

Steve Gow/Metro Canada

Four Christmases

REVIEW Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon star as a professional couple who always avoid their families during the holidays. After the film's worst plot contrivance traps them in the country and broadcasts their availability to their kin, the couple embark on their dreaded four Christmases.

Phil Brown/Metro Canada

Quantum of Solace

REVIEW The movie starts literally minutes after its predecessor, Casino Royale, ended, with a car chase that sums up director Marc Forster's brisk approach to the story. Action scenes are the meat of Bond movies. Most of what we see in Quantum of Solace is at least as good as the standards set in previous films; relentless, and more than a bit improbable. Daniel Craig's Bond is still an excellent incarnation of the character.

Rick McGinnis/Metro Canada

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Mark S. Allen, CBS/CW TV

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Jake Hamilton, KHOU-TV (CBS), Houston

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Owen Wilson Jennifer Aniston
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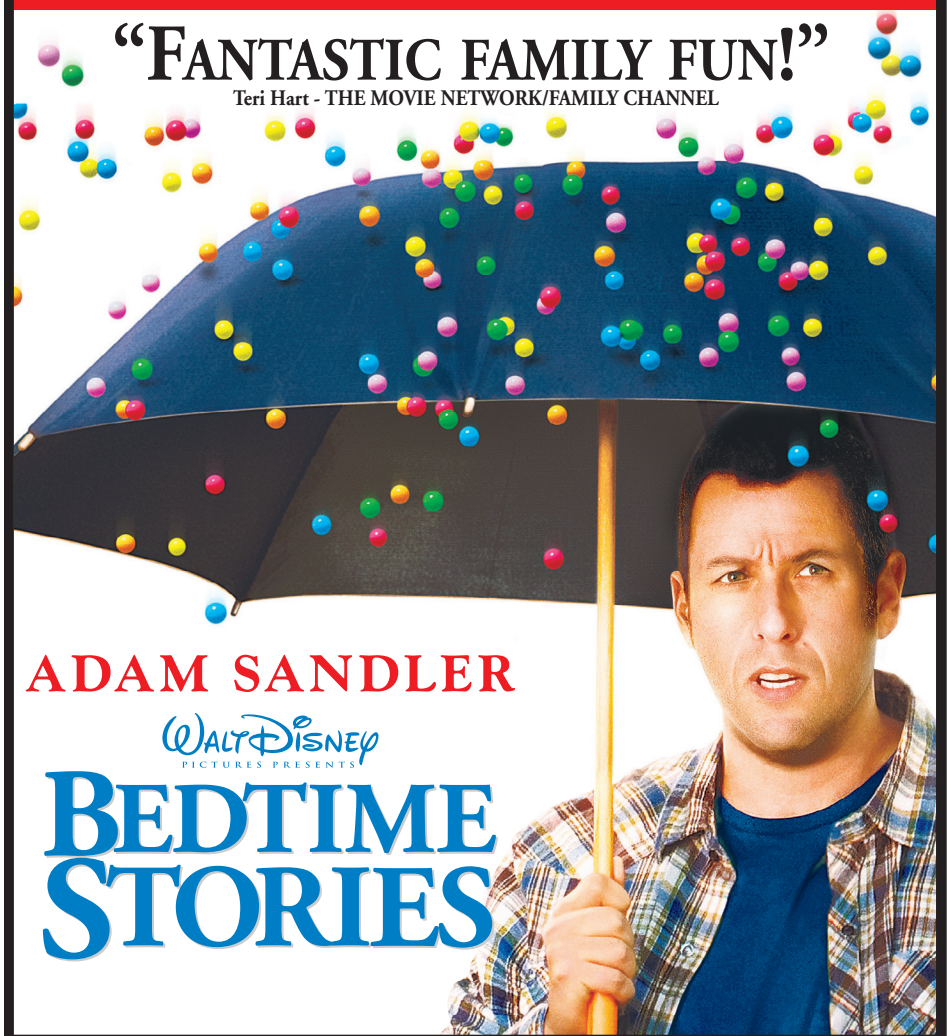

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Movies

Zombie romance and singing vampires: Canadian films in '09

Genres collide in next year's crop of Canadian films, with upcoming storylines incorporating white trash hijinks, teen tragedy, zombie romance and rock 'n' roll vampires.

Projects in the offing include Bruce McDonald's Pontypool, Mike Clattenburg's Trailer Park Boys sequel, Atom Egoyan's Adoration, and newcomer Rob Stefaniuk's musical vampire comedy Suck.

"There's some really, really exciting things happening," Telefilm's Dan Lyon says of the broad spectrum of flicks set for 2009.

"What we've noticed is increasing genre diversity. In other words, a little bit less reliance on traditional drama and moving more towards comedies and thrillers and other genres."

One of the most highly anticipated films is McDonald's Pontypool, about a zombie-like invasion that traps the staff of a small-town radio station in a church basement studio on a snowy Valentine's Day.

McDonald, the renegade director behind cult favourites Hardcore Logoand Highway 61, is loathe to slot the picture in the horror genre, insisting Pontypool is more of a love story, with an edge.

"We're sitting down with the marketing dudes and the company that's going to present it to the world (and there's) a lot of thought (like): 'Well, what is it going to look like? What's the poster and the trailer? What's the vibe we put out there?'" McDonald said during the Toronto International Film Festival.

"It shares some things with zombie movies but they're not zombies and we don't want to disappoint the zombie people, you know what I mean?"

The melding of genres continues with the outrageous Suck, a wild romp billed as a rock 'n' roll vampire comedy starring Rob Stefaniuk (who also writes and directs) and Jessica Pare, with appearances by Malcolm McDowell, Alice Cooper, Moby, Iggy Pop, Henry Rollins, Carole Pope and Dave Foley.

> **"It shares some things with zombie movies but they're not zombies and we don't want to disappoint the zombie people, you know what I mean?"**
> Bruce McDonald

"I've been watching dailies, it is absolutely a crowd pleaser," promises Lyon, who expects Suck to be ready for theatres next fall.

Big things are also expected of the sci-fi/horror movie Splice, directed by Vincenzo Natali of Cube, and starring Adrien Brody and Sarah Polley. "It's about a couple of scientists, played by Adrien and Sarah, who are crossing ethical lines in creating a human-animal hybrid, with disastrous results," says Lyon, noting the film is now in final post-production.

Steve Gravestock of the Toronto International Film Festival says he's most excited by the May release of Egoyan's family drama Adoration.

Starring Scott Speedman and Rachel Blanchard, the politically tinged tale touches on lies, technology and racism. It garnered mixed reviews on the festival circuit, but netted Egoyan the Ecumenical Jury Prize, which honours directing, at Cannes.

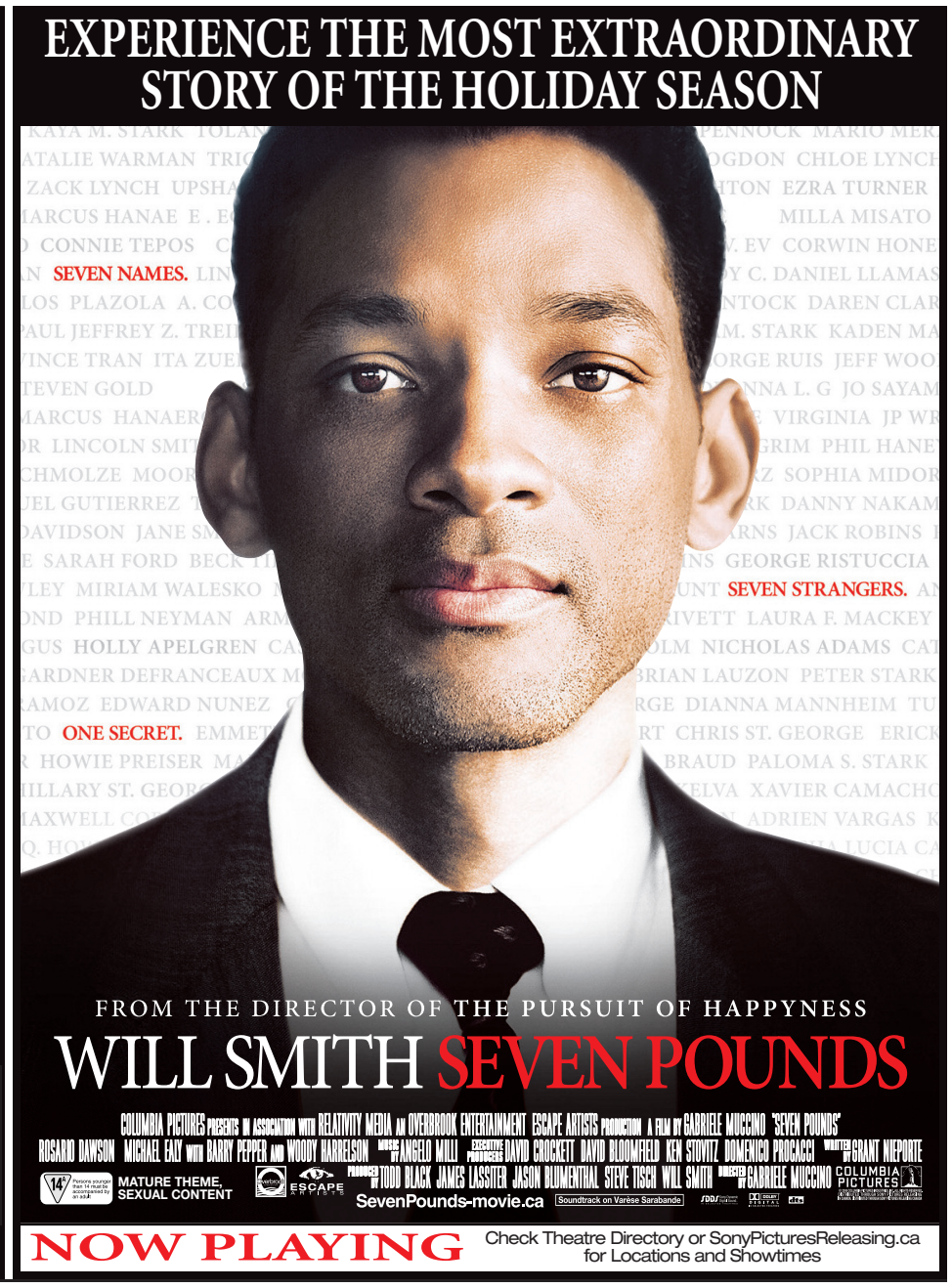
Other TIFF-screened films hoping to find audiences include the Inuit film Before Tomorrow, by directors Madeline Piujuq Ivalu and Marie-Helene Cousineau, which screens at the Sundance Film Festival next month, and Michael McGowan's road movie One Week, starring Joshua Jackson, due in March.

Meanwhile, first-time feature filmmaker David Bezmozgis is preparing to debut his coming-of-age story, Victoria Day at Sundance in January. The story follows 16-year-old Ben as he grapples with budding romance, family pressures and the role he may have played in a boy's mysterious disappearance.

"It's not a genre film, it's not an either-or film, it's not a comedy, it's not a tragedy," Bezmozgis said earlier this year of the movie, which takes place over the course of one week in 1988. THE CANADIAN PRESS

NATHAN DENETTE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Director Bruce McDonald poses for a photograph for the film Pontypool during the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival.



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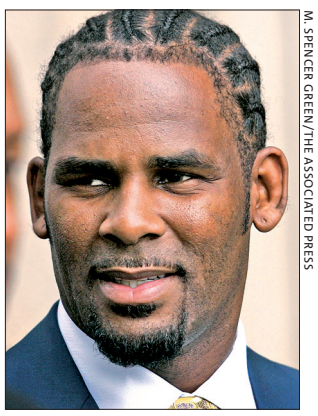
Bravissimo!
On Dec. 28, head to Roy Thompson Hall for a 2:30 p.m. performance of hits from operas including Madame Butterfly and the Barber of Seville. Prices range from $75 to $155. METRO NEWS SERVICES

People

Dubious achievements

This year, celebs obliged us with plenty of cringeworthy behaviour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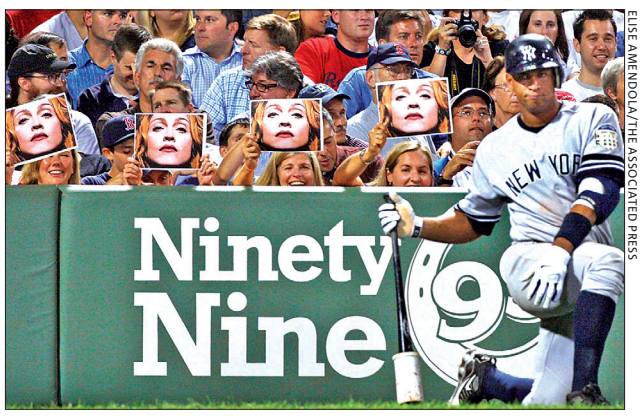

ELISE AMENDOLA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MATT SAYLES/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Left, R&B singer R. Kelly leaves the Cook County Criminal Court Building in Chicago during jury deliberations in his child pornography trial. Middle, spectators hold up photos of Madonna as New York Yankees' Alex Rodriguez waits in the on-deck circle during a game against the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. Right, Spencer Pratt and Heidi Montag arrive at the 2008 MTV Video Music Awards in Los Angeles.

Sure, we're glad that Britney Spears isn't in danger of being forcibly committed anymore and that Samantha Ronson has persuaded Lindsay Lohan to sober up and stop showing her firecrotch.

Yet we have to acknowledge we felt a little cheated when two of last year's biggest sideshows cleaned up their acts (for the most part) this year. Who would we shake our fingers at with disdain? Who would we mock? Who would we write about on our blogs during work hours?

But that's the good thing about Hollywood. Just when one celebrity gets on the straight and narrow, there are plenty of others who act the fool.

On the bright side, we get more Trapped episodes: R. Kelly has made a career based on getting off. So it should really be no surprise that he got off in epic fashion after a jury acquitted him of child pornography charges, despite a video featuring a man looking strikingly like Kelly getting freaky with a young girl.

While it's debatable whether justice was served, we do feel robbed of the chance to use all those R. Kelly jail remixes we had been working so hard on (Trapped in a Jail Cell, Step in the Cell of Love — though surprisingly, Feeling on Yo Booty needed little reworking).

Until low ratings, we do part: Given that the so-called reality show The Hills is choreographed, right down to Audrina Patridge's blank stares, should anyone be surprised that the Mexican "wedding" between the show's two villains, Heidi and Spencer, was actually a glorified photo shoot?

They said they planned to have it legalized in their home state of California later. We'll know the union is real when they do like other stars and confirm it with a People magazine wedding spread — or their divorce papers are filed.

Biggest shocker: We fell off our collective chairs when Clay Aiken revealed his stunning news — no, not *that* disclosure (we knew he was gay before he did). The real surprise of the year was that Aiken had become a baby daddy with his good friend Jaymes Foster — and that Jaymes was a woman.

We waited three years for this? "Really uncool": Jennifer Aniston finally hit back at saintly home-wrecker Angelina Jolie, saying Jolie's comments about being transfixed by Brad Pitt while he was still married to Aniston were "really uncool" — which is the kind of comment you make after someone steals your place in line, not your husband.

We guess the much-sought-after catfight between Aniston and Jolie will have to wait until at least 2011 — or after Jolie has her quads.

No, really, we're just friends: Where have we heard that one before? From just about every celeb caught hooking up with the person who would later become their significant other (including Jolie and Pitt). That latest denial came from Alex Rodriguez, as the baseball star denied a romance with Madonna — who spent all year denying an impending split from hubby Guy Ritchie, only to break up with him and reach a tentative divorce settlement in less time than she recorded her album.

Comeback/train wreck of the year: We should have known Amy Winehouse's Grammy triumph was too good to be true — after all, she celebrated her five wins while on a brief furlough from rehab. Still, she took the accelerated path to destruction with arrests, hospitalizations, fights and more rehab: It got so bad her father told the media that she had damaged her lungs so much from smoking crack, she only had 70 per cent lung capacity. An alarmed Winehouse then cut back her toking by 30 per cent.

Kanye outburst of the year: The temperamental rapper was put in handcuffs after getting into a scuffle with paparazzi at the Los Angeles airport. Actually, they were just former fans who targeted him after he did one-too-many blog posts in all capital letters.

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Music

What to buy with that Christmas cash

If you're going to indulge, you may as well go whole hog

SoundCheck

Alan Cross

alan@ongoinghistory.com

Since there's a good chance that you're reading this on your way to some kind of Boxing Day sale — the Canadian version of America's Black Friday shopping orgy — it's probably a good time to offer a list of ideas of where to invest Grandma's Christmas money.

For the undead metal fan:

Although White Zombie was subsumed into leader Rob Zombie's overall ambitions back in 1996, they've been resurrected (sorry) with a box set called Let Sleeping Corpses Lie, featuring five discs chronicling 64 studio recordings, 10 live performances and nine videos. Expect to spend around $70.

For the Mama Mia freak:

For the life of me, I can't understand the enduring appeal of ABBA but with 400 million albums sold, who am I to judge? If you're late to the party, the fastest way to catch up is with the nine-disc collection called ABBA: The Albums. This means all eight studio albums plus another disc filled with B-sides and rarities. That's another $70.

For the wannabe jazz fan:

Jazz is an acquired taste for many people, so those who want to get into the scene need to tread carefully lest they be put off by the genre's complexities and nuances.

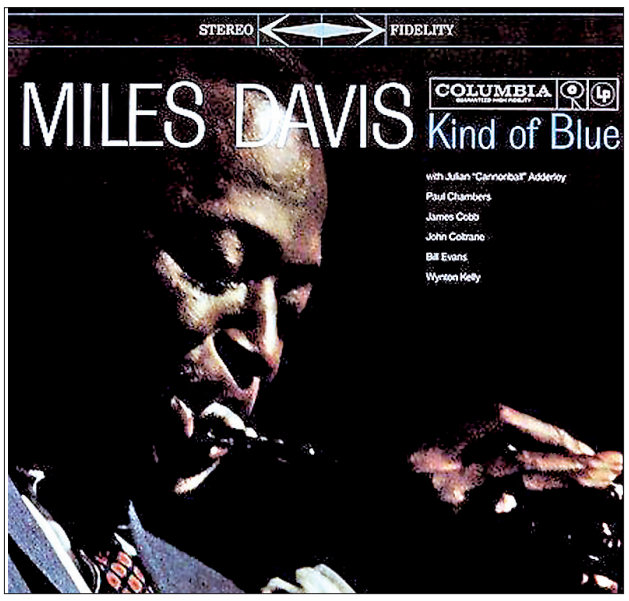
For my money, a great place to start is Miles Davis' classic, Kind of Blue, the best-selling jazz record of all time. Recorded in just two sessions in the spring of 1959, its brilliance is staggering. For $80, you get the 50th anniversary edition featuring outtakes, a version of the album on blue vinyl, a 60-page book and nearly 90 minutes of DVD footage.

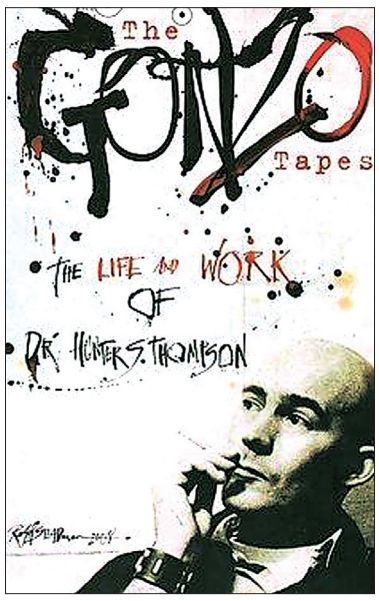
For the gonzo in all of us:

Hunter S. Thompson may be gone, but while he was alive, he committed nearly everything to tape. Six hours of tequila-and-drugs stream-of-consciousness journalism is now available for $45 on The Gonzo Tapes: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson.

For the make-believe rock star: Guitar Hero has come out in six incarnations since it was launched in 2005, which translates to 22 million copies in the US alone. Then Rock Band upped the ante by introducing microphones and drum kits, bringing families together in strange ways.

Buying all the peripheral gear can get expensive, but with competition fiercer than ever — and with some people predicting that mania over music games has peaked — this might be the best time to buy in or upgrade. Things start at about $50.





Clockwise from top left, Let Sleeping Corpses Lie, a five-disc box set from White Zombie; ABBA: The Albums, a nine-disc collection that includes eight studio albums plus a disc comprising B-sides and rarities; the 50th anniversary edition of Miles Davis' Kind of Blue, which includes outtakes, a version of the album on blue vinyl and nearly 90 minutes of DVD footage; and The Gonzo Tapes: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, featuring six hours' worth of his recordings.

The Ongoing History of New Music can be heard on stations across Canada. Read the daily Music Geek blog at ongoinghistory.com

Will 2009 bring relief for concert-ticket buyers — or more of the same?

January 2009 could be the start of a new era for concert-ticket buyers who are fed up with exorbitant prices, extraneous service charges and a lack of competition in the marketplace.

That's when Live Nation will start taking on Ticketmaster in the United States — with plans to do the same in Canada by 2010 — and there are already promises being made about how the new competition will empower the consumer.

"We still believe the venue, the artist and the fan would love an alternative ticketing company," said Live Nation chief executive Michael Rapino during a recent conference call. "I think it's probably the only industry in the world ... that doesn't have a good No. 2 or No. 3 (competitor).

"We believe that competition will drive a better price for the fan."

"I don't know if it's going to mean one bit of difference for the general public or not, to be perfectly honest."

Tim Baker, Sunrise Records

In the other corner, Ticketmaster recently announced it's "experimenting" with selling tickets with no extra fees attached, as long as the customer prints out their tickets at home.

Even though ticket buyers have long vilified Ticketmaster for introducing those fees in the first place, company president Sean Moriarty insists he's been advocating for "the fan-friendly move to no-fee or all-in pricing."

"The initial reaction from fans has been overwhelmingly positive," he said during a conference call. "We look to lead the way with this dramatic new approach and fundamentally change the way tickets are sold."

But some industry watchers predict concertgoers won't be won over by Ticketmaster's new strategy, and that Live Nation will eventually be held in the same esteem as their much-maligned rival. "Competition is good, it keeps everyone on their toes," said Tim Baker, the head buyer for Sunrise Records, which handles the lion's share of Ticketmaster's retail sales in southern Ontario.

"But I don't know if it's going to mean one bit of difference for the general public or not, to be perfectly honest."

Terry McBride, founder and president of Vancouver-based Nettwerk Music Group, said there are major changes coming in the ticketing business but he predicted most will improve the companies' bottom lines, while doing little to reduce prices.

"Ticketmaster just moved the fees within the ticket price," McBride said of the company's plan to do away with separate service charges. "All they really said was rather than stand outside, the fees are now going to stand inside the ticket price."

Ticketmaster has told investors that is true but, said Moriarty, the company believes consumers won't complain about paying the extra fees as long as they're invisibly bundled into the price.

While both Ticketmaster and Live Nation say they expect that competition and recessionary pressures will drive prices down somewhat, they also don't believe today's highest-priced tickets are too expensive.

Moriarty said the whole range of ticket prices will probably decrease a little as fans question the true worth of a concert experience, although he believes promoters won't be forced to drastically slash prices.

Live Nation's foray into the concert market will be limited at first, and fans won't have the choice of selecting which company to buy tickets from.

Live Nation will sell tickets for venues it owns or operates, and has the rights to some limited sales for the all-star artists it works with, including the likes of U2, Madonna, AC/DC, Jay-Z, Nickelback, Coldplay, and the Jonas Brothers.

The company's reach is further limited in Canada currently, since it only controls two venues, Toronto's Molson Amphitheatre and Vancouver's Commodore Ballroom.

But the company is already promoting more and more shows in Canada — with sales going through Ticketmaster — and it was Live Nation that put on this summer's inaugural Pemberton Festival in British Columbia.

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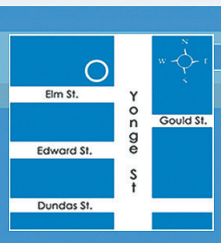

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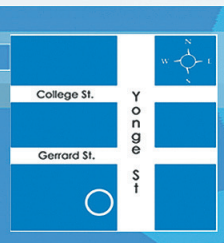

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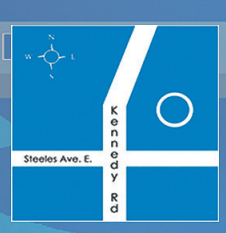

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Honourable mentions
Rock albums that nearly made The Associated Press' top 10 of 2008 include: Firewater, The Golden Hour; Wolf Parade, At Mount Zoomer; M83, Saturdays Youth; Vampire Weekend, Vampire Weekend; and Death Cab for Cutie, Narrow Stairs. **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Music

It's time out for Feist

Singer says she hasn't stopped in six years

BRIAN TOWIE
brian.towie@metronews.ca

Feist is taking a well-deserved break from superstardom. After a six-year whirlwind that saw the folk singer-songwriter from Calgary rise to international fame and acclaim, Leslie Feist plans on taking at least a half-year hiatus from music, letting her voice heal and regrouping for a possible third album.

But it has been a hell of a blitz. In that time Feist released the Juno Award-winning Let It Die, which went platinum in Canada and gold in France, and The Reminder — a worldwide multi-platinum album that was both a Juno winner and Grammy nominee.

Single 1234 became ubiquitous on iPod commercials, shot to the top of many an international chart and was rated one of Time Magazine's best songs of 2007.

Add in a series of world tours, appearances on Sesame Street and The Colbert Report and you can see why a vacation might be justified.

BRIAN TOWIE/METRO CANADA

Singer-songwriter Leslie Feist made a recent surprise appearance at Harbord Collegiate Institute. The school was presented with a MusiCounts Band Aid musical instrument grant for over $10,000.

"Six months, maybe more. I can't rightly say how long I'm going to take. Hopefully at some point my laryngitis will go away," she laughs.

"I've been touring for six years and Let It Die just duck-tailed right into The Reminder, and we recorded The Reminder on tour and I just haven't stopped. I just want to see what it's like to cook and sleep in and stuff."

Yet Feist still works during her downtime, giving back to the community. She says this during a recent surprise appearance at Harbord Collegiate Institute in downtown Toronto, when the school was presented with a MusiCounts Band Aid musical instrument grant for more than $10,000.

"Six months, maybe more. I can't rightly say how long I'm going to take. Hopefully at some point my laryngitis will go away."
Leslie Feist

"It's really great to be able to come in and see a part of a community that I normally never get to see," the sometime Broken Social Scene member said.

"This is really important stuff that goes on in a high school, and I can just vaguely remember how important it was when I was there."

In the meantime, you can get your Feist fix on Stephen Colbert's holiday DVD A Colbert Christmas: The Greatest Gift Of All!, where she plays an angel taking the satirical pundit's telephone call to God.

"It was like getting invited back to the cool kids' table at the cafeteria to be invited twice to Colbert," she said.

"He's amazing. He's unparalleled. He's the best. I would do anything he asked, including putting on an angel costume."

Top rock albums of 2008

Rock music in 2008 was dominated by relics from the past, most returning with respectable albums: Guns 'n Roses, AC/DC, Metallica and, er, Coldplay. But there was better stuff to be found. With apologies to fans of Kings of Leon and Bon Iver, here are the top 10 rock albums of the year. (Radiohead's In Rainbows, given away in 2007 and released traditionally in 2008, was rated last year.)

1 Constantines
Kensington Heights
The most underrated band in North America hails from Toronto, is led by Bryan Webb's angst-ridden growl, and is capable of leaving any beer-soaked bar crowd slack-jawed and devastated. Five years after the excellent Shine a Light, the Constantines still carry on the tradition of Bruce Springsteen with anthemic, uplifting rock dirges.

2 The Hold Steady
Stay Positive
Like the Constantines, the Hold Steady worship at the altar of the Boss. This is a good thing. Though their last, Boys and Girls of America, may have been better, the Hold Steady, ah em, hold steady with another stellar album. The glorious single Sequestered of Memphis is surely the first song to make the phrase ``I went there on business'' sound riveting.

3 Fleet Foxes
Fleet Foxes
The sonorous, multipart harmonies of Seattle's Fleet Foxes bring to mind the Beach Boys, had they moved up the coast and swapped their surfboards for a wooded campfire. Half a year after their debut, they're beginning to age like Crosby, Stills & Nash — but there are worse things.

4 Santogold
Santogold
You could quibble that Santogold isn't truly rock, but she really defies categorization. L.E.S. Artistes and Lights Out were among the best rock tunes of the year.

5 No Age
Nouns
Who knew L.A. punk existed? And that it was so good? Nothing about No Age was expected, making it all the more exciting.

6 Lykke Li
Youth Novels:
Lykke Li is a 22-year-old Swedish pop pixie. Little Bit and I'm Good, I'm Gone were two of the most danceable songs all year — as evidenced by no less than the ever-jitterbugging Lykke Li herself. But it's the cooing Time Flies that cements Youth Novels as an excellent album.

7 TV on the Radio,
Dear Science
The bouncy guitar riff on Crying is, alone, really enough to make this one of the year's best. The Brooklyn brainiacs' last one (Return to Cookie Mountain) was better, but TV on the Radio are nevertheless the most vital, current band in America.

8 Black Keys
Attack and Release
The Black Keys could be anyone's favourite band. Two goofy dudes from Akron, Ohio, who make some of the rawest, most soulful blues. This is their most dynamic and full album yet, which can be partly attributed to producer Danger Mouse.

9 Jenny Lewis
Acid Tongue
Like Elvis Costello (who guests on Acid Tongue), Lewis will likely turn out an excellent album most every year — whether as a solo act or in her band Rilo Kiley — for decades to come.

10 Dr. Dog
Fate
Some find this Philadelphia group too retro. They, after all, seemingly want to, literally, be the Band. But with a bass that thumps just like Rick Danko's, Dr. Dog stirs up life in old sounds.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hot off of a 'dream year,' music retailers look to big 2009 albums

NEW RELEASES Music retailers say 2008 was a "dream year" for new releases but there's already an all-star lineup of rumoured and confirmed albums due in 2009, including a much-anticipated CD from one of the world's biggest bands.

Though the trend of declining record sales continues, HMV Canada's director of product Ken Kirkwood said 2008 was still a good year for retailers, considering the glut of big-name CDs that were released. "We're all happy because there's been something new almost every week," he said. But there are still plenty of other A-list acts preparing to drop CDs in the months ahead:

- On March 3, U2 plans to release their 12th studio album, No Line on the Horizon, their first CD in more than four years. Producer Daniel Lanois has said the album is "fantastically innovative and, I believe, some of their best work."
- There are a few big hip-hop albums slated for the new year, including CDs by Canadians K'naan and k-os, as well as Dr. Dre, Timbaland, and Eminem and his former protege 50 Cent, whose album Before I Self Destruct is expected to hit stores on Feb. 3, 2009.
- Jay Z is working on an album called The Blueprint 3 that may be released in 2009, and new CDs are also expected from Billy Talent, Coldplay, Green Day, the Dave Matthews Band and the Tragically Hip.
- Neil Young fans await the first volume of his multi-part career retrospective, expected out in February
- The indie rock world is looking forward to new albums from artists including Andrew Bird, Animal Collective, Antony and the Johnsons, Bon Iver, Built to Spill and Postal Service.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Television

Sorting the wheat from the chaff

IntelleVision

Rick McGinnis

rick.mcginnis@metronews.ca

Looking back on the year in television is hindered only slightly by the fact — repeated almost monthly since I began writing this column four years ago — that I don't really watch much television at all, if I can help it.

Certainly, I don't think I could bear writing about TV daily if I had to endure a steady diet of sitcoms, police procedurals, network reality programming and news every day.

The truth is that I rarely spend much time in the single-digit and lower reaches of the double-digit dial, which probably makes me sound like the typical TV critic snob who proselytizes endlessly for shows like The Wire, Breaking Bad and Mad Men.

That said, I'd be lying if I said that Mad Men wasn't my favorite show, both this year and last, though even as I write this, I can anticipate the word "overrated" pattering back at me like hail on the roof of a ragtop.

For all of the critical love the show gets, it's rarely cracked two million in ratings, which pretty much guarantees cancellation on network, which might actually explain why increasingly balkanized viewers have found refuge on cable, where they might stand a chance of seeing two or even three seasons of their favorite show, or even seeing it come to a somewhat satisfying finale at its creator's behest.

"You're probably going to completely write me off when I tell you that my favourite TV show all year was... (a) biopic on the young Margaret Thatcher."

You might even think that I'm a huge snob it I tell you that I'm looking forward to digesting The Wire at my leisure now that I have the complete box set, and that I'm looking forward to doing the same with Breaking Bad when it arrives in the new year, around the same time as the new Battlestar Galactica set.

Frankly, that's the way I end up watching most new TV these days, when I'm not downloading it from file-sharing networks, or watching it on tiny 1 1/2- by 2 1/2-inch windows on my computer.

That's how I ended up watching most of Architecture School, a competition/home makeover reality show produced by the Sundance Channel, and so far unavailable on the Documentary Channel, its natural home here.

And you're probably going to completely write me off when I tell you that my favorite TV show all year was The Long Walk To Finchley, a 90-minute biopic on the young Margaret Thatcher I caught by chance on TVO while flipping the channels late one night.

Styled as a saucy, droll melodrama depicting the still-molten Iron Lady as a steely feminist battling the pooterish Tory party establishment to land a safe seat in parliament, it cast a palpably sexy young actress (Andrea Riseborough) as Thatcher, all husky alto, shapely legs and Bette Davis eyes.

It was such a refreshing take on politics — all but unimaginable here in Canada, God knows why — and prompted an unanticipated new likelihood that I will, quite against my better judgement, be imagining Baroness Thatcher as a babe. Damn you, television!

DANIEL BEREHULAK/GETTY IMAGES

Think you had a rough year? In 2008, a TV biopic forced Metro columnist Rick McGinnis to begin thinking of Baroness Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister, as a hottie.

Rick McGinnis writes about music, movies, books and television, but not opera.

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For budding directors
At the NFB's Winter Carnival Animation Workshops, from Dec. 27 to Jan. 4 at 150 John St., kids can create an animated film using clay, paper cut outs, ice sculptures and 2D cartoons, while the whole family can enjoy a holiday-themed NFB film. METRO NEWS SERVICES

Going Out

Classic car saga won't slow down

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang is Fleming's enduring automotive creation

Shaken, not stirred. The mantra that author Ian Fleming coined to describe how his most famous creation — James Bond — liked his martinis also comes in handy to illuminate the trajectory of Fleming's second most illustrious brainchild, the amazing car called Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

The touring version of the London and Broadway hit Chitty Chitty Bang Bang is now in Toronto.

"Searching for a tale to delight his child — who complained that the James Bond stories were 'too sexy' for him to appreciate — Fleming delved into his childhood."

First a novel, then a movie and finally a musical comedy, Fleming's durable automotive creation arrived in Toronto in time for the holiday season, when Mirvish Productions welcomed the touring version of the London and Broadway hit to the Canon Theatre on Christmas Eve.

Fleming was near the end of his life in 1964 when he penned this flamboyant saga of a magical auto for his son, Caspar.

Searching for a tale to delight his child — who complained that the James Bond stories were "too sexy" for him to appreciate — Fleming delved into his childhood, when he used to visit the stately homes and gardens of Higham Park (nicknamed "Chitty Bang Bang"), where Count Louis Zborowski would frequently display his fleet of aero-engine racing cars.

Fleming took his memories of the resplendent autos and wove a story about inventor Caractacus Pott, who renovated an old Grand Prix racing car called the Paragon Panther and turned it into a vehicle with extraordinary powers that he christened "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang."

As you might expect from Fleming, his saga has a certain sophisticated air, moving from Calais to Paris, focusing on a sublime chocolate shop, and even including a recipe for French fudge.

The great success of the book demanded that it be turned into a movie, and fellow children's author Roald Dahl adapted it for the screen after Fleming's death in 1964.

The film that emerged in 1968 was right at the end of a musical movie boom generated by Mary Poppins in 1964 and The Sound Of Music in 1965.

The fraternal team of Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman composed the score for the film of Chitty Chitty Band Bang, just as they had done for Mary Poppins.

And Dick Van Dyke, the beloved Bert from Poppins's London, returned as the endearing inventor Potts (with an "s" added to his name).

Whereas Fleming had given his hero a dullish wife named Mimsey, Dahl, in the film, turned Potts into a widower whose heart was captured by Truly Scrumptious, played by Sally Ann Howes in her best Julie Andrews-wannabe style.

In the original story, Fleming had his car only develop magical traits when they were needed, like in a traffic jam en route to a beach picnic. (Imagine how handy that would be in the collector lanes on the 401.)

But in the film, the automotive beauty is capable of countless transmogrifications, coming to the rescue of its young owners in the markedly more melodramatic plot, which includes the villainous Baron and Baroness Bomburst from Vulgaria.

Although the reviews for the film were not overwhelmingly positive ("something of the joys of singing together on a team bus on the way to a game" is how Renata Adler described it in the New York Times), and the initial run of the movie only grossed $7 million (U.S.) on a budget of $10 million, the property lingered in people's consciousness over the decades.

And when the wash of family-friendly musical theatre overtook the horizon as the new millennium arrived, it wasn't surprising that Chitty Chitty Bang Bang made it onto the lists.

Because of its heavily British origins, a London opening was the logical move. Adrian Noble (former head of the Royal Shakespeare Company and director of last summer's Hamlet with Ben Carlson here at Stratford) was enlisted for the staging; Gillian Lynne (the choreographer behind Cats and The Phantom of the Opera) made everyone move in a pleasing pattern; and Michael Ball, one of London's most beloved musical theatre stars, played Caractacus Potts.

Tons of ink was spilled over whether the flying auto worked or didn't (initially, no; eventually, yes) but the British public kept it running for three successful years.

Chitty's American experience was less salubrious, even though it featured popular Broadway stars like Raul Esparza, Erin Dilly and Jan Maxwell.

It opened in April, 2005 and closed eight months later, after receiving reviews like Ben Brantley's in the New York Times, which said, "This is, after all, a work which makes The Lion King look like Mondo Cane" and described the sensation of seeing it as "hanging out for two and a half hours at the Times Square branch of Toys 'R' Us."

Still, Broadway is Broadway, while Toronto is Toronto and so it's likely our city's Anglophone roots will embrace Chitty Chitty Bang Bang as the high-flying Anglophone-flavoured entertainment it was meant to be.

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Feast day
On the sixth day of Kwanzaa, Kuumba (creativity), there is a great feast or Karamu ... Some favourite dishes of the Karamu are stewed snapper, Congo rice and peas, fried chicken, baked potato pie, corn bread and calaloo and vegetable ital stew. **SECTION15.CA**

Food

The basic Joloff Rice recipe (with bacon or ham in place of chicken) is identical to, and probably the origin of, a dish called Red Rice in the Southeastern United States (and usually called Spanish Rice in the rest of the continent).
CONGOCOOKBOOK.COM

EDITOR: NINA DRAGICEVIC, NINA.DRAGICEVIC@METRONEWS.CA

Dishing up a taste of Africa

Get into the Kwanzaa spirit with a colourful chicken-and-rice entree

À **la** carte

Barb Holland
metronews.ca/alacarte

Kwanzaa is a unique African American celebration with focus on the traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce and self-improvement. Kwanzaa is neither political nor religious and despite some misconceptions, is not a substitute for Christmas. It is simply a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors and culture.

Kwanzaa, which means "first fruits of the harvest" in the African language Kiswahili, has gained tremendous acceptance. Since its founding in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, Kwanzaa has come to be observed by millions of people worldwide.

When establishing Kwanzaa in 1966, Dr. Karenga included an additional "a" to the end of the spelling to reflect the difference between the African American celebration (Kwanzaa) and the Motherland spelling (kwanza).

Kwanzaa, a seven-day celebration from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1, is based on the Nguzo Saba (seven guiding principles), one for each day of the observance.

BARB HOLLAND/FOR METRO CANADA

Joloff Chicken and Rice is a colourful West African dish that's often served on special occasions.

Joloff Chicken and Rice

Food is a part of any celebration. This well-known, colourful West African dish is often served on special occasions. I made this with parboiled (not instant) rice, but other long grain rice should work well. I did not find ground dried shrimps. Instead, add ½ tsp (2 ml) salt to the rice. Makes 6 servings.

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- 2 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 1 tsp (5 ml) dried thyme leaves
- pinch each salt and pepper
- 1 to 2 tbsp (15-30 ml) vegetable oil
- 14 oz (398 ml) can diced tomatoes (or half a 28 oz/796 ml)
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) tomato paste
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cups (500 ml) chicken broth
- 2 tbsp (30 ml) ground dried shrimps or crayfish (optional)
- 1-1/2 cups (375 ml) long grain rice
- 1 fresh green chilli, seeded and finely chopped
- Fresh or dried thyme, to garnish

METHOD:

Rub chicken with garlic, thyme, salt and pepper. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Cook chicken (in batches) until browned on both sides; transfer to a plate, adding more oil if needed.

Add tomatoes, tomato paste and onion to pan. Cook over medium-high heat until tomatoes have thickened somewhat, about five minutes. Add broth and dried shrimps, if using, and bring to a boil.

Measure out 1 cup (250 ml) tomato cooking liquid. Add enough water to make 3 cups (750 ml) and pour over rice in a separate saucepan (add salt). Bring rice mixture to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed, 10 to 15 minutes. Set aside, covered to keep warm.

Meanwhile, add green chilli to remaining tomato cooking liquid. Add chicken to pan, covering chicken with sauce. Simmer until chicken is cooked through, about 15 minutes.

Transfer chicken pieces to a warm serving plate, cover to keep warm. Increase heat on sauce to high and cook until nicely thickened, about five minutes. Serve chicken with rice and sauce. Garnish with thyme.

Barb Holland is a professional home economist and food writer who believes in shopping locally and in season.

3D Instructor Inspires

Lee Murray has joined Herzing College Toronto as the main 3D Animation Instructor. During his 3D career he has worked on Animated Television shows, Game Cut scenes, Advertisements for Television and Animated Feature films. His work includes Animation credits for a Television show created at C.O.R.E Animation called 'Urban Vermin'. Lee worked as a Motion Capture Actor and Animator for 'The Darkness' video game and 'Justice Heroes' video game. "The various areas you can specialize within 3D is amazing, everything from a Creature Animator to a Set Modeler", says Lee.

Possessing advanced skills in many 3D software programs Lee has the know how to create and manipulate the art required for various 3D projects. His area of expertise is Character Animation.

Since coming on board at Herzing, Lee has inspired the 3D students. His extensive practical experience, his caring teaching style and many years of instructing experience makes him a very popular 3D Animation instructor.

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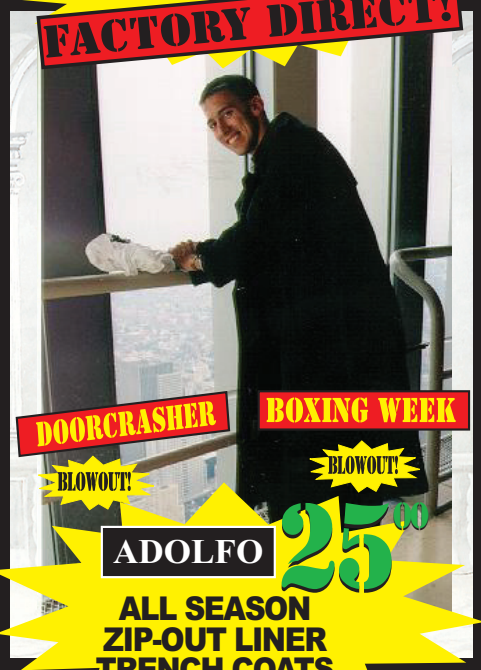

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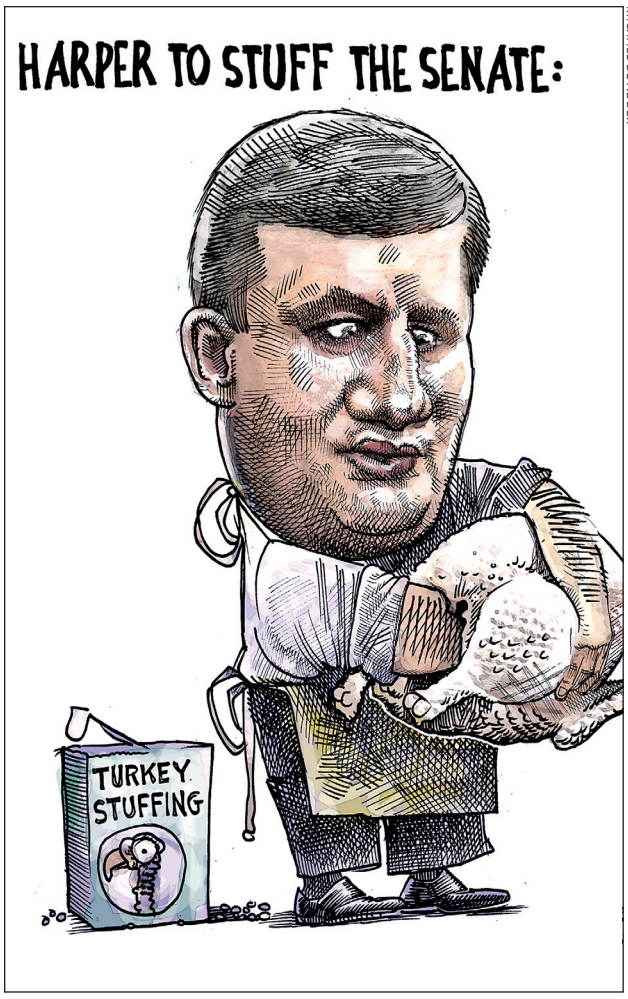

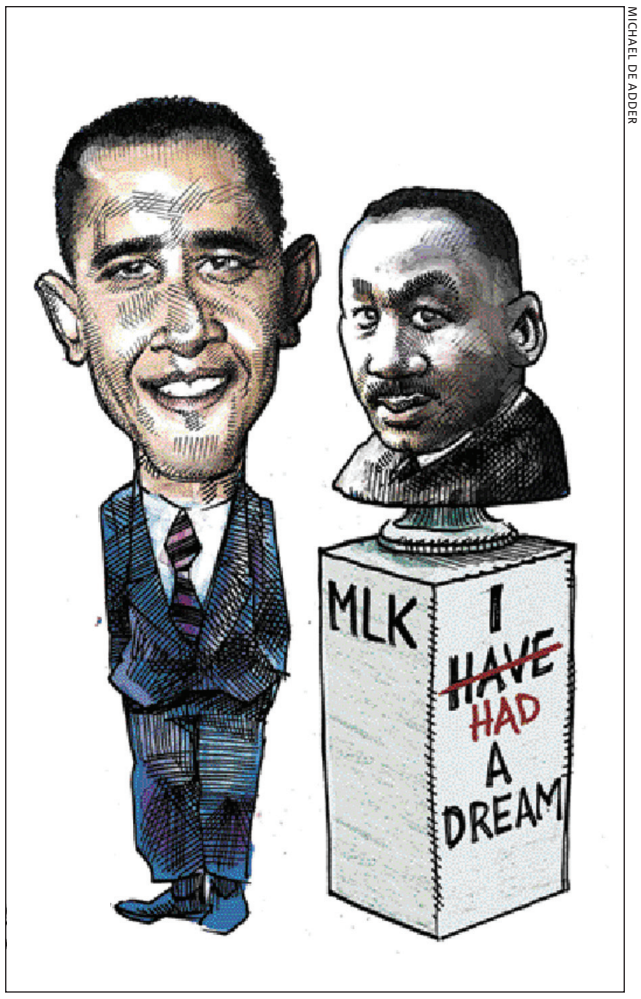

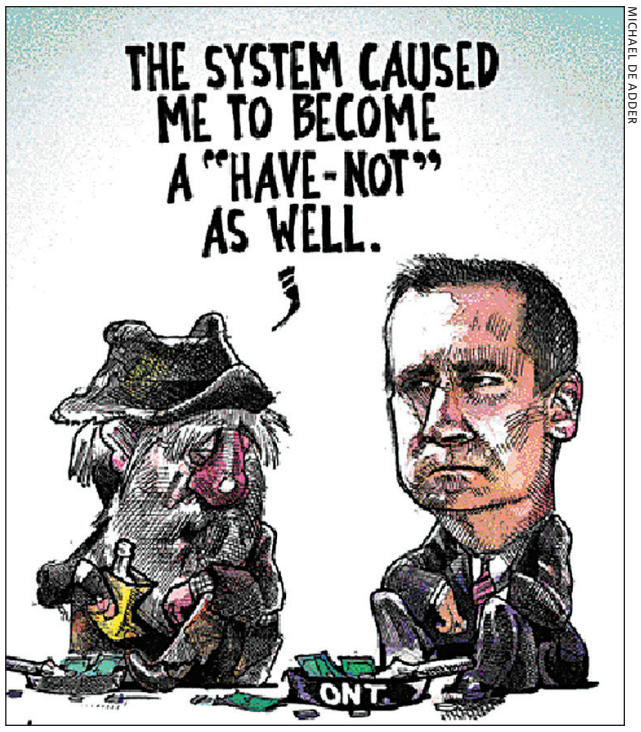

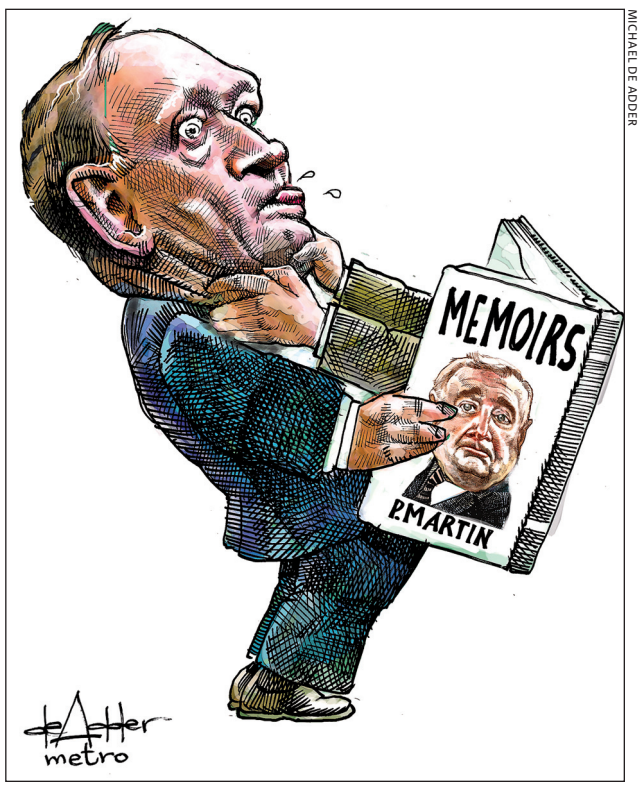

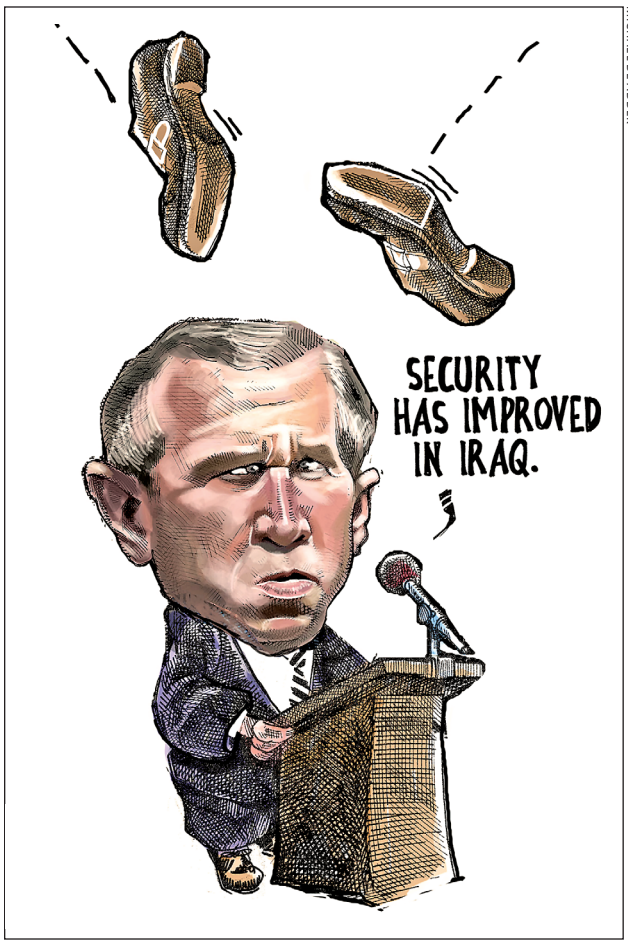

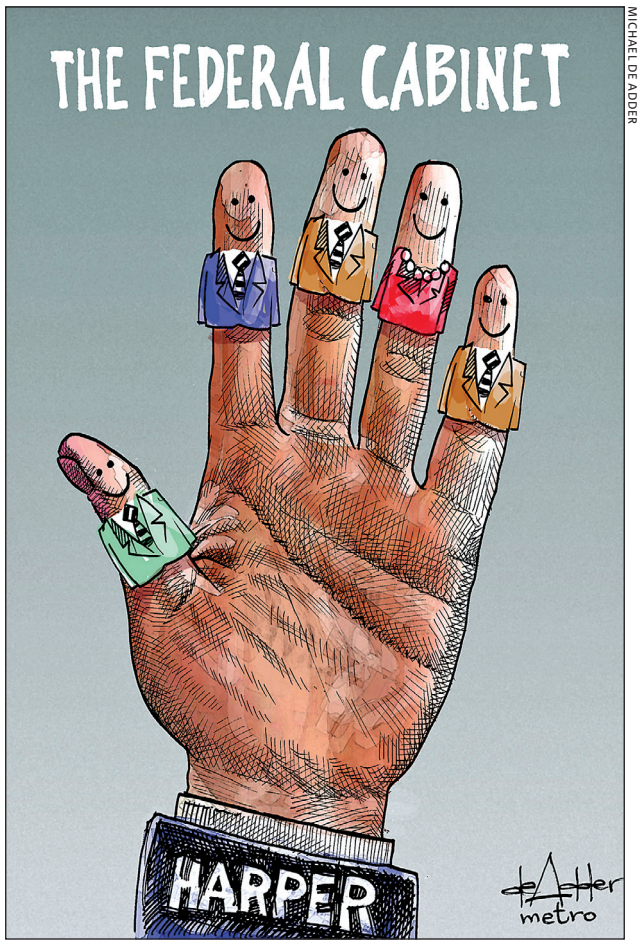

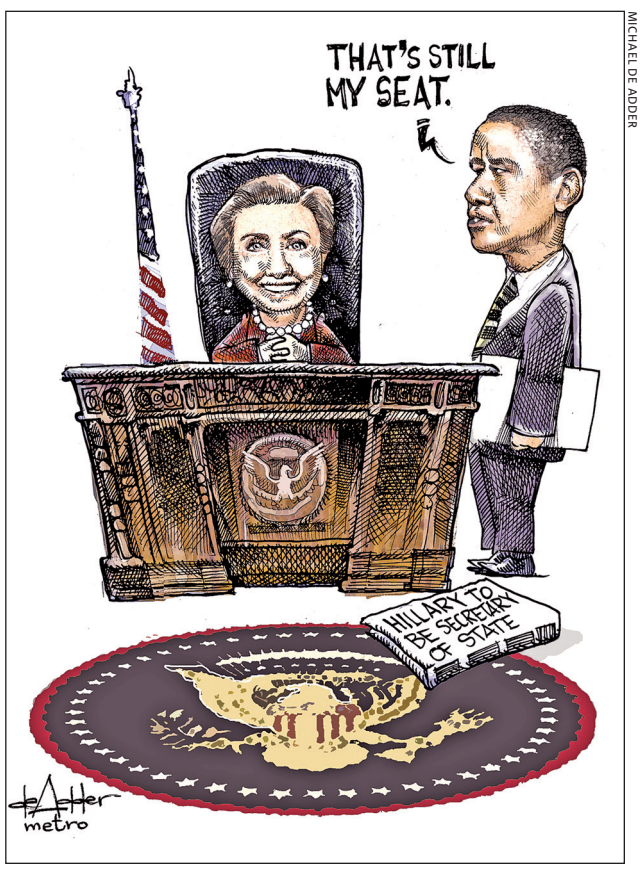

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- 2810 Major Mackenzie Dr.

MARKHAM
- 7357 Woodbine Ave.
- 8392 Kennedy Rd.
- Cachet Village
- Market Village
- Markville Shopping Centre
- Pacific Mall

MILTON
- 377 Main St E

MISSISSAUGA
- 980 Eglinton Ave. E
- 2800 Skymark Ave.
- 6965 Davand Dr.
- Central Parkway Mall
- Dixie Value Mall
- Erin Mills Town Centre
- Heartland Power Centre
- Mississauga Chinese Centre
- Sheridan Centre
- Square One Shopping Centre
- Westgate SmartCentres
- Westwood Mall

NEWMARKET
- Upper Canada Mall

NORTH YORK
- 170 Rimrock Rd
- 1635 Lawrence Ave.W.
- 2081 Steeles Ave. W
- Bayview Village
- Crossroads Plaza
- Empress Walk
- Lawrence Square
- North York Sheridan Mall
- Sheppard Centre
- Yorkgate Mall

OAKVILLE
- Hopedale Mall (kiosk)
- Oakville Place
- Winston Power Centre

ORANGEVILLE
- 114 Broadway Ave.

OSHAWA
- Five Points Mall
- Oshawa Centre

PICKERING
- 570 Kingston Rd
- Pickering Town Centre

RICHMOND HILL
- Elgin Mills Crossing
- Hillcrest Mall
- Richmond Heights Plaza
- Time Square Shopping Centre

SCARBOROUGH
- 259 Morningside Ave.
- Bridlewood Mall (Kiosk)
- Cedarbrae Mall (kiosk)
- Chartwell Shopping Center
- Eglinton Square
- Kennedy Commons
- Malvern Town Centre
- Parkway Mall
- Scarborough Town Centre

SUDBURY
- Brady Square
- New Sudbury Centre
- Southridge Mall

THORNHILL
- 2900 Steeles Ave.
- Promenade Mall

TORONTO
- 85 Hanna Ave.
- 320 Queen Street W
- 209 Danforth Ave.
- 2171 Queen St. E
- 2256 Bloor St.W
- 2323 Yonge St.
- Brookfield Place
- Chinatown Centre
- College Park
- Commerce Court
- Cumberland Terrace
- Dufferin Mall
- East York Town Centre
- Eaton Centre
- Eaton Centre II
- Exchange Tower
- Gerrard Square
- Scotia Plaza
- Toronto Life Square
- Yorkdale (kiosk)

UNIONVILLE
- 190 main St

UXBRIDGE
- 307 Toronto St S

VAUGHAN
- Vaughan Mills

WHITBY
- Whitby Mall
- Whitby SmartCentres

WILLOWDALE
- Fairview Mall

WOODBRIDGE
- 4080 Highway 7